THE BRITISH INVASION OF DC COMICS

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THE GREAT BRITISH COMICS MAGAZINE!

100 PAGE SPECIAL!

HATCH

PAT MILLS

KEN REID

BRYAN TALBOT

YELLOWKNIFE

DEATH'S HEAD

ABC WARRIORS

CAPTAIN HURRICANE

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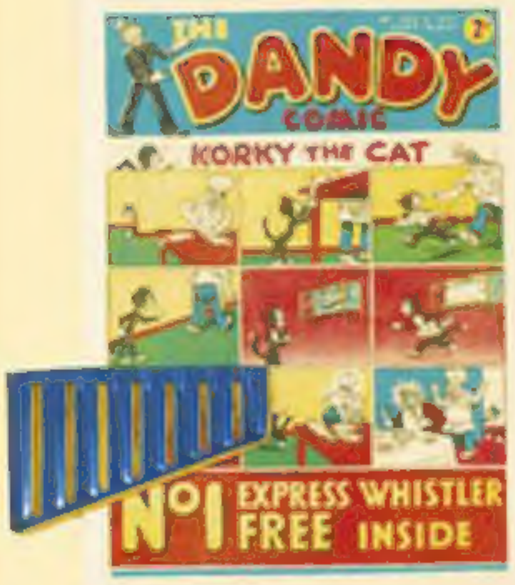

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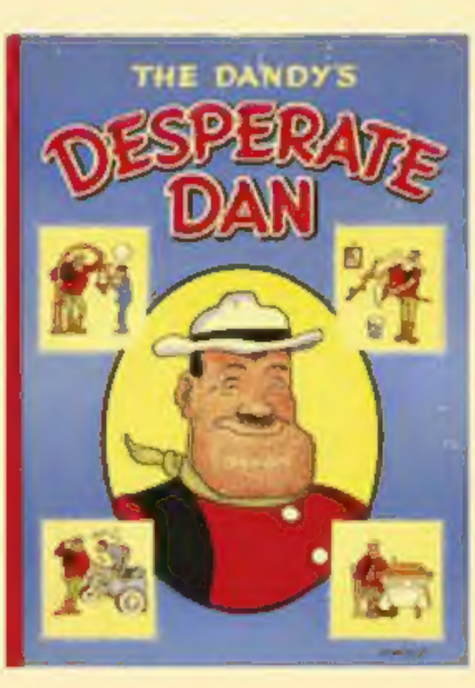
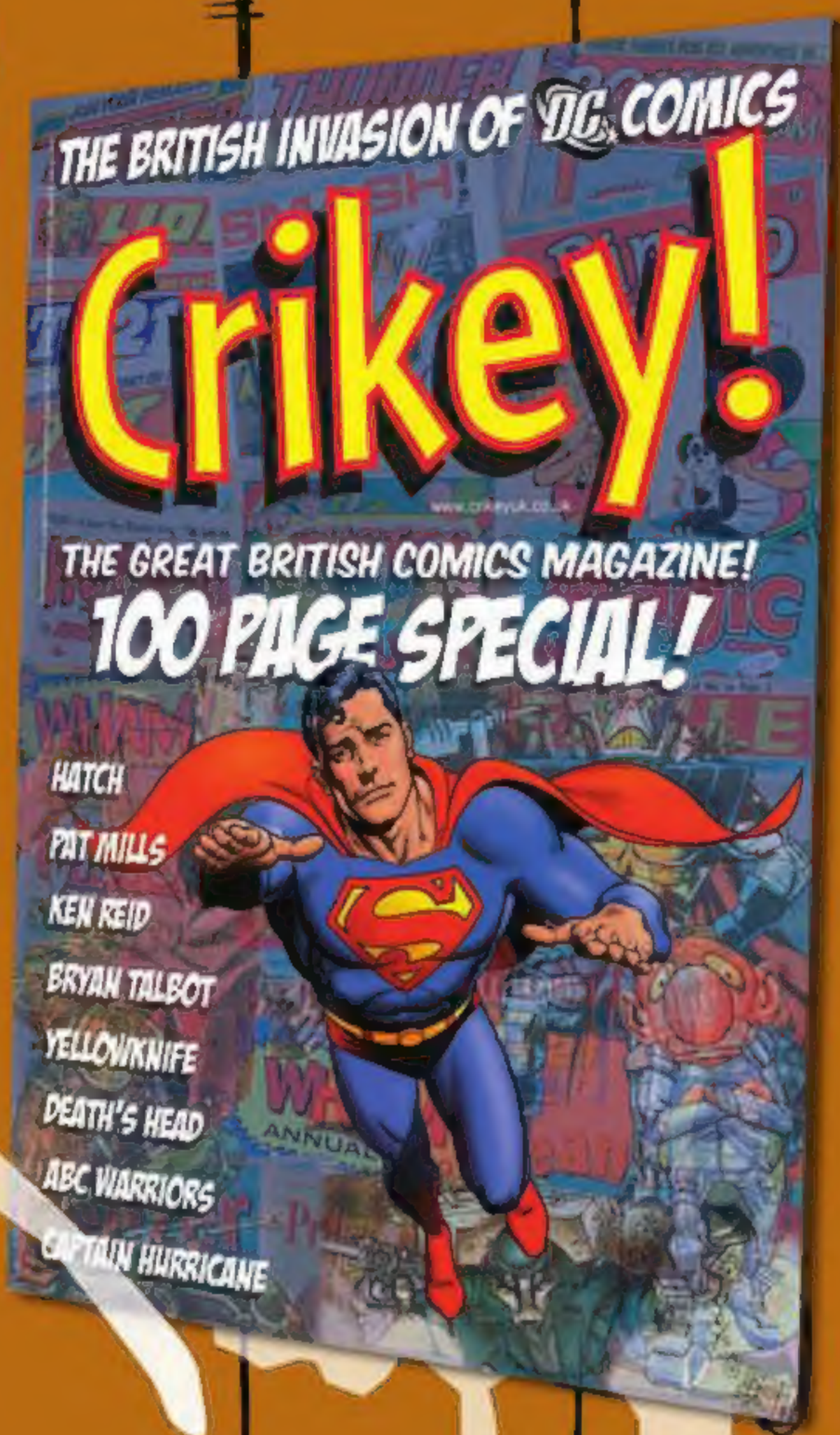


HATCH

BY GLENN B FLEMING

CONTINUED OVERLEAF...

OUT NOW!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A Note from the Publisher...

Well–we're back! And how! It's been a long year for Tony and I. As you all know, we had to make the painful decision to cancel our beloved magazine last year. Finally, we had so much material left over and had so many disappointed writers that Tony and I decided we should put all this stuff out. Somehow. Reality, however, would always follow these discussions: simply put, we had no money to produced the magazine we wanted. So we shelved it again and again and worked on other things. Crikey! was always there though, in our conversations on the telephone or by email or in our minds. So many people had asked if we would continue at some point. Always it was "No".

Then, just by chance, a way was found to make this a reality; I came across an on-line publisher. This meant three fundamental things: we could publish as many pages as we wanted (we could even have an odd number of pages if necessary!). They could all be in full colour. And no money for printers was needed (The leading American companies appear to be doing the same this year... but we've beaten them to it!). To publish a 100+ page full colour 'hard copy' magazine such as this would have cost us thousands. This is the modern age and we embraced it. We then contacted our 'big guns' and asked if they would contribute. Pat Mills and Bryan Talbot immediately said yes, and delivered material within a couple of weeks. Again, we say a huge "thanks" to them for their support. Tony contacted our friends on the internet sites and forums; John Freeman at Down the Tubes and Lew Stringer immediately posted news on their respective websites. We thank them also. All our contributors shouted "YES!" at us. It seems everybody has missed Crikey! this past year. We had to do it. So we did. The Crikey! Special. Over one hundred pages of your favourite British Comics Magazine.

We hope you enjoy it!

Glenn B Fleming/Publisher

(Why not check out Super-Spies & Secret Agents issue 2 - we have re-released it in this format! 60 pages of full colour spy-stuff! Go on, you know you want to and it's only £1.99!!)

A Note from the Editor...

Greetings, and welcome to another edition of Crikey!

Which has probably come as something of a surprise, to some. Including us.

However, we're back, bigger and bolder than ever and in a brand new digital format which we think looks beautiful. Which is just as well, as nothing less would have done justice to some of the amazing stuff we have for you; from Valiant to Death's Head to Captain Scarlet, and with contributions from the living legend that is Pat Mills and an exclusive interview with Bryan Talbot on his forthcoming projects!

Plus, as this is the first digital version of Crikey!, it seemed appropriate to mark the occasion of DC Comics' imminent advance into the world of digital media by looking back over their long history and explaining just exactly why the British explosion of the eighties was so important to them and to the world of comics in general.

Throw in the return of Hatch and 4D Jones and you can't go wrong. Right?

Tony Ingram/Editor

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Alex Wiggan tells us of the decade when he was born.

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Ian Wheeler talks about Action *and interviews artists Kev Hopgood and Lee Russell.*

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Jamie Hailstone takes us back to the 60s, TV21 *and Gerry Anderson's indestructable hero.*

ABC Warriors
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Steve Laming takes us back to the heady days of his youth!

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The British Invasion of DC COMICS

by Tony Ingram

February 2010 marked the 75th anniversary of the publication of New Fun: the Big Comic Magazine #1, the first comic book published by National Allied Publications, the company that would eventually become DC Comics. So popular and groundbreaking was this title that publisher Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson followed it up almost immediately, only 11 months later, with New Comics #1 (December 1935), and then in 1937 with Detective Comics #1. And then, the Major sold the company and moved on. But from these inauspicious beginnings came a company which quickly rose to dominate the fledgling US comics industry for decades, and which changed the face of comics forever by ushering in the age of that (at first) uniquely American phenomenon, the costumed super hero, with the creation of the single most instantly recognisable comic book icon of all time –Superman!

"All this is all very well, but," I hear you cry. "Crikey! is supposed to be about British Comics.What's the British connection?" Well, I could (I think justifiably) say that DC's 75th is a monumental milestone in the history of comics worldwide. Where, after all, would comics be if Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster hadn't unleashed *Superman* on the world in 1938, or if Bob Kane hadn't (partly) created the Batman in order to cash in on Superman's success and spent the next twenty years pretending to write him? Where would we be if a psychologist with a bondage fixation and some very odd ideas about feminism hadn't created Wonder Woman? Well, we'd have missed out on seeing Lynda Carter in a star spangled swimsuit for a start, and that would never do!

But the fact is that, all this aside, this most American of companies does indeed have a strong connection to the world of British comics and to the creative talents who have dominated it for the last quarter of a century. Because if not for those decidedly home grown talents, our colonial cousins' own comics industry might well be a very different place today, and in my humble opinion a much poorer one at that! I'm talking, of course, about the 'British Invasion' of the Eighties!

In the early Eighties, DC (and most notably editor Len Wein) targeted a number of British creators to reinvigorate the company's still profitable but arguably by now, in places, somewhat stale line. This included artists Brian Bolland (about whom, more later) and Dave Gibbons, the latter of whom had an acclaimed run working alongside Wein chronicling the adventures of DC's space cop, *Green Lantern*, from 1983-1985. Gibbons would continue to work for DC throughout the Eighties on features as diverse as The Creeper, Superman and Tales of the Green Lantern Corps. Arguably his best Green Lantern strip was the one-off backup tale 'Mogo Doesn't Socialize', written by Alan Moore, in *Green Lantern* #188, though in truth I think Gibbons overall still ranks as one of the best artists ever to work on the adventures of the emerald crusader.

Later, Kevin O'Neill (another artist who, like Gibbons, had attracted attention to himself with his work on classic British anthology title *2000AD*) would also tackle the Green Lantern mythos, though his 1986 offering in a Tales of the Green Lantern Corps strip scandalised the Comics Code Authority, who found his art style offensive! Bolland, Gibbons and O'Neill were all members of the Society of Strip Illustrators who were apparently formally approached by DC at one of their meetings with an open invitation; others who came later included Alan Davis and Mark Farmer.

Later, DC would begin to poach British writers too, including Alan Grant and John Wagner (who would have a huge impact on the *Batman* titles after first penning the 12 issue 1987 series *Outcasts*, drawn by Scottish artist Cam Kennedy) and Pat Mills, who collaborated with Kevin O'Neill on the limited series *Metalzoic*. While Mills and Wagner would part company with DC comparatively quickly, Grant remained one of the regular Batman writers until the tail end of the 1990s and his work on the character is still highly regarded.

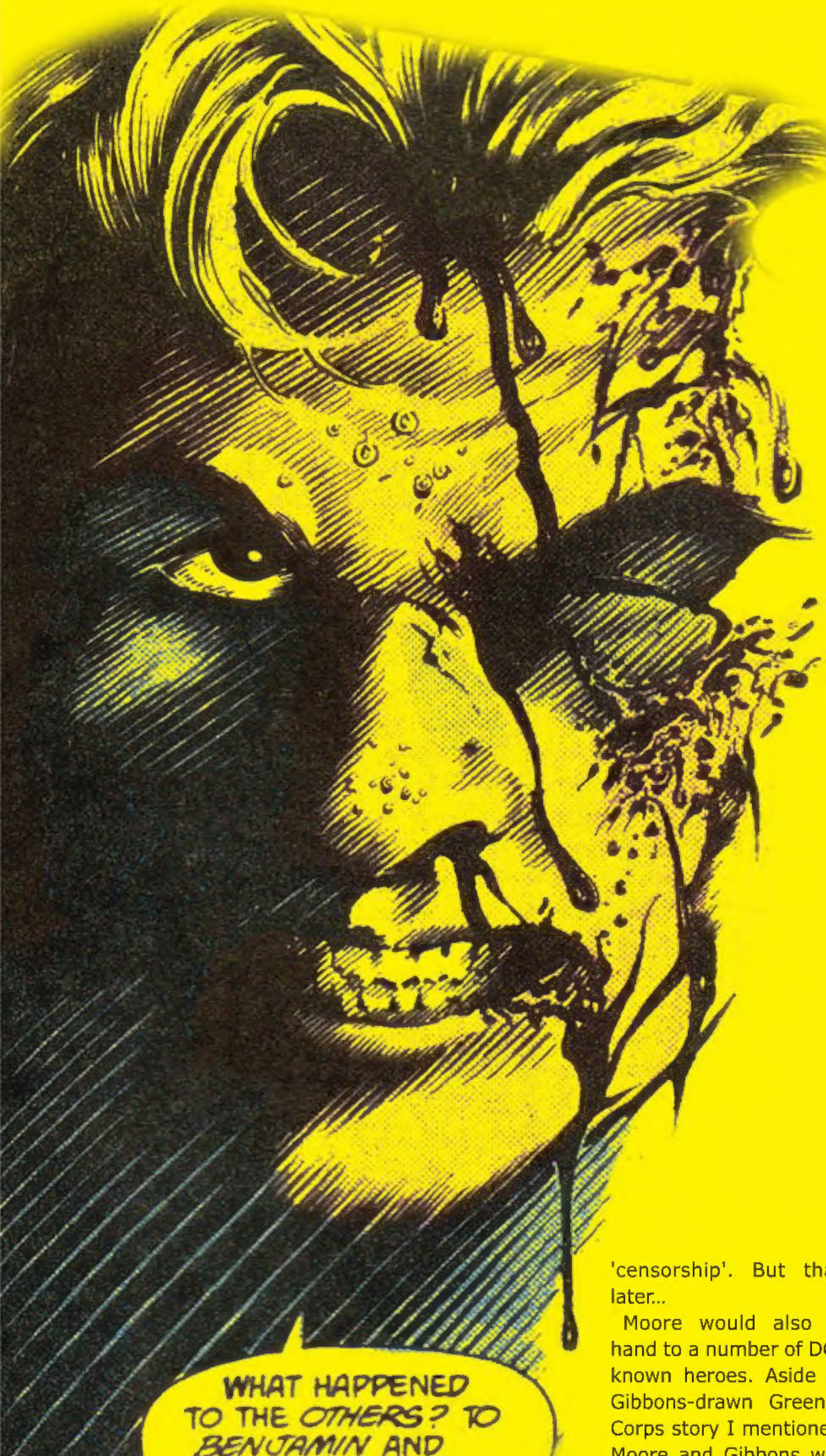
But it was Alan Moore's arrival on *Swamp Thing* in 1983 that really began to unlock the potential of the comic strip medium as far as DC was concerned. Originally created by Wein and Bernie Wrightson in the 1970s, Swamp Thing was at first reckoned to be a scientist named Alec Holland, transformed in a rather unlikely accident into a fairly generic swamp monster in the same tradition as Hillman's The Heap and Marvel's Man-Thing. Moore, though, almost immediately discarded most of the creatures past history and revealed that it was in fact an Earth elemental which merely believed itself to be a dead man named Alec Holland, having been imprinted with the dying scientists memories!

This wasn't the only revisionist approach to an existing DC character in that book either, as Moore turned Z-list villain the Plant Master into a deranged crusader for the vegetable kingdom, revealed that old 'horror hosts' Cain and Abel (the storytellers who had fronted the old House of Mystery and House of Secrets titles) were actually living representations of the Biblical characters who spent their eternal lives constantly reliving Cain's murder of his brother, and gave a new edge to comics legendery creator Jack

Kirby's old character, the Demon Etrigan.

Later issues brought in characters as diverse as Zatara the magician (first seen in *Action Comics* #1, the same book that had introduced Superman back in 1938), Lex Luthor (Superman's archenemy shown here as a truly terrifying individual) and, most notably, a brand new character who would go on to become a DC superstar in his own right - chain-smoking mystery man John Constantine, an enigmatic British magician who originally appeared in the strip simply because artists Steve Bissette and John Totleben wanted to draw a character who looked like the musician Sting!

Over the course of his run on the series, Moore wove a dark and intricate tapestry of horror, romance and mystery which garnered critical acclaim and eventually helped cause DC to rethink the way they marketed comics. This would eventually lead to the creation of the Vertigo line, DC's 'mature readers' imprint. Ironically, Moore himself eventually quit Swamp Thing in protest at the decision to put a 'mature readers' tag on the book, which he regarded as



longtime Superman artist Curt Swan) in *Superman* #423 and *Action Comics* #583.

This rather dark tale showed some of the sillier characters and concepts of the Silver Age Superman stories in a new light as, some ten years after Superman's last public appearance, a reporter interviews the former Lois Lane about his final days and learns how many of the Man of Steel's friends and foes died in the final battle with a sinister new incarnation of the formerly ludicrous Mr. Mxyzptlk. Ultimately, the reporter leaves believing that Superman also died after being depowered by Gold Kryptonite and wandering off into the Arctic wastes to atone for his killing of Mxyzptlk. The readers learn, though, that Lois's new husband, a car mechanic named Jordan Elliot, is in fact the former Man of Steel, happily living a quiet life at last.

Immediately afterwards, John Byrne (another writer born in Britain, though he moved to Canada at the age of eight) revamped Superman completely (in fact, his Man of Steel limited series, which rewrote Superman's origins, was published a few months before *Action* #583, but the newly relaunched Superman series debuted the month after it) making Moore's story really the end of an era. It also marked Curt Swan's (involuntary) departure from the Superman books after almost thirty years, though he would occasionally return to the character for special projects.

Having tackled Superman, in 1988 Moore would go on to work on DC's other major icon, Batman, in the graphic novel *The Killing Joke*, which saw the former Batgirl Barbara Gordon crippled by the Joker, and explored the possible reasons for his insanity and the nature of his relationship with The Dark Knight. The artist on the book was another *2000AD* stalwart, Lincolnshire born Brian Bolland (see, I hadn't forgotten him!), who had effectively

'censorship'. But that came later...

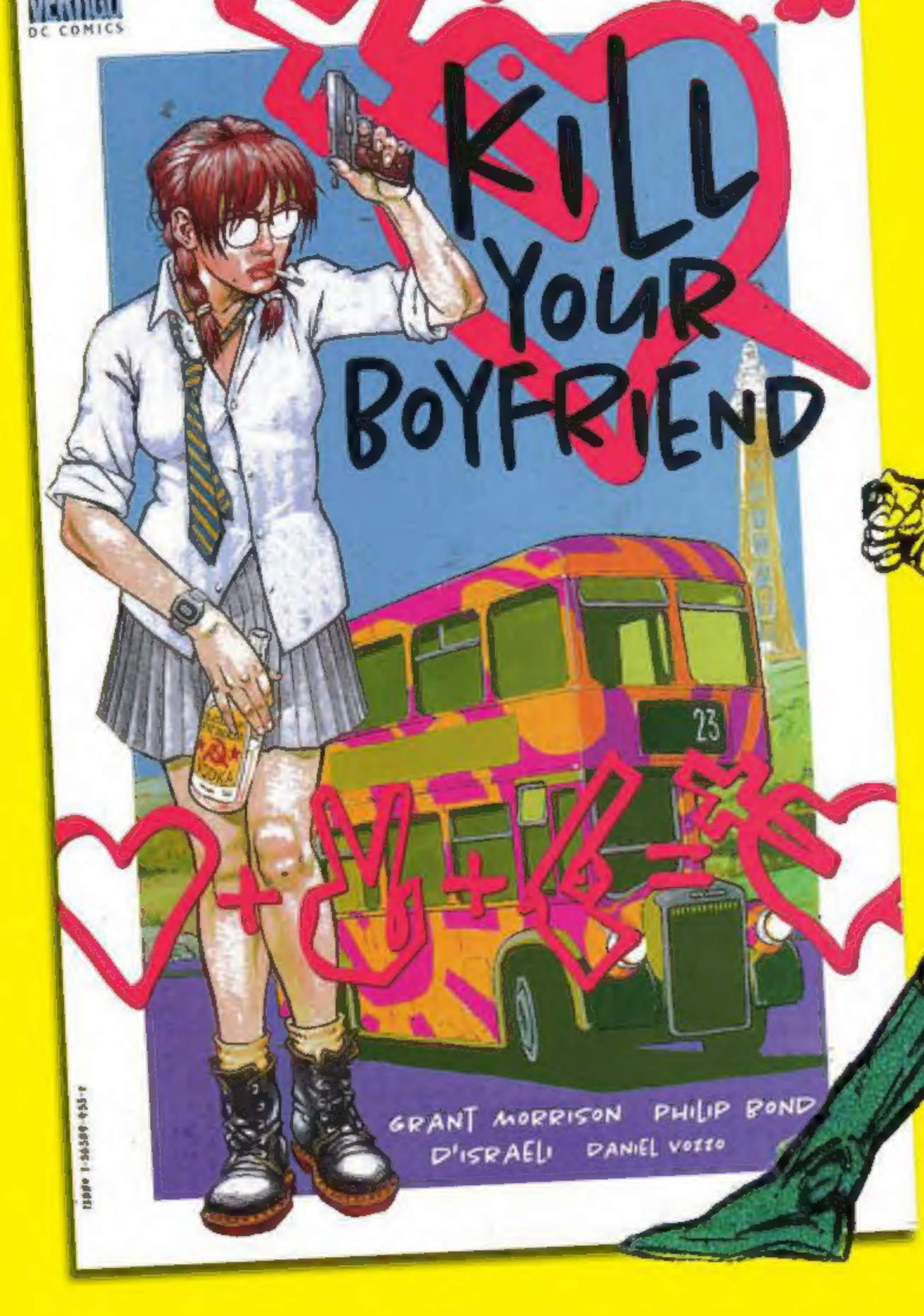
Moore would also turn his hand to a number of DC's better known heroes. Aside from the Gibbons-drawn Green Lantern Corps story I mentioned earlier, Moore and Gibbons would also collaborate on the well-remembered tale 'For the Man Who Has Everything' in *Superman Annual* #11 (1985), and Moore later went on to write what was effectively the last story to feature the Silver Age Superman, the two-part 'Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?' (pencilled by

spearheaded the British invasion in 1982 when, after drawing a few covers and a chapter of a Justice League anniversary story in the previous couple of years, he was picked to illustrate writer Mike W Barr's *Camelot 3000*, DC's first 12 issue 'maxi-series', about reincarnated versions of King Arthur and his knights fighting off alien invaders who have subjugated Earth. The series has been reprinted in collected editions twice so far, most recently in 2008. Bolland subsequently went on to draw several more Batman stories, though he's best known these days for his frequent work on covers.

Alan Davis, another sometime collaborator of Moore's, also worked on Batman, both on the Caped Crusader's solo series in 1986 and, prior to that, on Mike W. Barr's team book *Batman & the Outsiders* in 1985. Davis has continued to occasionally work for DC, often alongside Mark Farmer, who frequently inks his pencils. Among their most well received works are the Elseworlds (meaning non-canonical) series *JLA: the Nail* and its sequel *JLA: Another Nail*, both set in a world where Pa Kent's truck got a puncture and he never found the infant who would become Superman.

In 1986, Moore and Gibbons created Watchmen, a 12-part series which began to change the public perception of comics as 'kids' stuff'. Originally intended to feature the characters DC had purchased from Charlton Comics' defunct 'Action Heroes' line, this plan was changed when it became

--SO WHO AM I TO TELL YOU THAT YOU SHOULD GIVE UP BEING GREEN LANTERN?
IT JUST DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE TO ME.
YOU'RE RIGHT, PAL-- IT WAS SELFISH TO ASK.
I SHOULDN'T HAVE BOTHERED YOU AT A TIME LIKE THIS...
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! IT WAS NO BOTHER, HAL...
...NO BOTHER AT ALL...
THERE IS THE MAN OF THE JLA TRANS-PORTER TUBE.
THEN, GREEN LANTERN IS GONE--
--LEAVING THE FLASH TO WRESTLE WITH HIS OWN PRIVATE DEMONS...
CUT: TO THE BUSTLING SKIES OVER METROPOLIS...
I'M REALLY GLAD YOU DECIDED TO TALK TO ME BEFORE YOU DID ANYTHING RASH...
WELL, YOU'VE BEEN IN THIS BUSINESS LONGER THAN JUST ABOUT ANYONE ELSE--
--SO I FIGURED IF ANYONE WOULD KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THIS PROBLEM, IT'D BE YOU!
WANT THESE THUGS ANYWHERE IN PARTICULAR?



apparent that the storyline Moore had in mind would leave most of those characters unusable in the future. Understandably reticent to just write off about a dozen properties they'd only just bought, including Captain Atom and the Blue Beetle, DC editor Dick Giordano asked Moore to use new characters instead.

This he did–though the new guys bore a strong resemblance to the Charlton originals, the Blue Beetle becoming Nite Owl, the Question becoming the addled vigilante Rorschach, Captain Atom being transformed into Doctor Manhattan, Nightshade into Silk Spectre, Peacemaker into The Comedian and Peter Cannon: Thunderbolt into the scheming Ozymandias. Some of these parallels are looser than others though; whereas Nite Owl is evidently based closely on the second Blue Beetle and we even meet his predecessor, clearly based on the first, Rorschach–while visually resembling the Question–is actually based on Steve Ditko's 'Mr. A' in other respects, and while the original Silk Spectre does indeed vaguely resemble Nightshade, her modern day counterpart is closer to the Black Canary. Nightshade did not impress Moore, it seems.

But if the characters in Watchmen are derivative, the story is wholly original. An at times genuinely disturbing exploration at what kind of people would logically be likely to choose to become costumed superheroes (answer: extremely screwed up people), Watchmen begins as a murder mystery before developing into a huge conspiracy storyline involving a number of characters who, though they're supposedly 'heroes', you would definitely be uncomfortable sharing a bus stop with. Ironically, the two most deranged individuals in the book–Rorschach and The Comedian–are also the most sympathetic, since Rorschach has been driven quite mad due to a lifetime of horrific experiences but still clings to a rigid idea of right and wrong, while The Comedian, although vicious and self-centred, is at least honest.

The rest are driven mostly by either power complexes (Ozymandias), parent issues (Silk Spectre) or a thinly disguised sexual fetish for beating people up (Nite Owl). And in the end, Ozymandias destroys a city full of innocents in order to end the Cold War, and our heroes let him walk away because they have no option. Only Rorschach objects and dies at Dr Manhattan's hand as a result. It is a work of undoubted genius but a far from comfortable read, with Gibbons' expressive art really bringing the story to life and drawing us into a story which thoroughly deserved the critical praise heaped on it by both the industry and the wider world (it even won a Hugo Award). It was one of the first series to be collected together as a 'graphic novel', a development which completely changed the way comics were marketed over the next few years, not just by DC but by their competitors as well.

Unfortunately, disagreements over the contacts he and Gibbons had with DC over Watchmen soured Moore's relationship with them: they had insisted on a reversion clause whereby if DC didn't use the properties for a year, the rights would return to the creators, a condition DC agreed to. But DC have since then never let the series go out of print so the clause became irrelevant. The same situation applied to Moore and artist David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* series, which they had begun for *Warrior* magazine in Britain but

agreed to finish at DC, who gained the reprint rights to the published issues in 1988. Moore eventually severed ties with DC in 1989 as a result.

With titles like *Swamp Thing*, *Watchmen*, and Frank Miller's *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns* clearly indicating that there was an audience for titles aimed at older readers with more sophisticated tastes, DC editor Karen Berger continued to lure across more of the British talents who seemed to be able to create material that appealed to those tastes. Scottish writer Grant Morrison, who had begun to test the limits of the superhero genre in 2000AD's *Zenith*, continued to do so when hired to write a new title featuring DC's near forgotten Sixties creation Animal Man in September 1988.

His work was greeted with such enthusiasm that within months he was also asked to take over the ailing *Doom Patrol* title, which he rapidly turned from a rather stale superhero book nobody read into a bizarre fantasy which many read, though arguably few understood! Creations like Crazy Jane, the Brotherhood of Dada, Danny the Street (a sentient, mobile transvestite road) and Flex Mentallo, Man of Muscle Mystery (based on the guy who got sand kicked in his face in the old Charles Atlas ads) baffled and even angered some Doom Patrol fans, but the fabulous freaks' original creator Arnold Drake praised Morrison for being the only writer to have remained true to the spirit of the original series!

The same year Morrison took over Doom Patrol also saw the publication of his hardback graphic novel Arkham Asylum: a Serious House on Serious Earth (with Berkshire-born artist Dave McKean), a horrifying tale which looked at the parallels between the obsessive Batman and his psychotic foes as the hero was forced to confront the lunatics in the asylum they had taken over. Morrison tackled Batman again more than once, and would later write a lengthy and acclaimed run of JLA (Justice League of America) among others in the Nineties and beyond.

He continues to chronicle the adventures of various mainstream DC characters today, but well-written though his superhero stories are, in my opinion his real strength seems to lie in more outré stories. His Animal Man run, for instance, ended after 26 issues with Animal Man coming face to face with Morrison himself and learning the truth of his own fictional existence, though sadly this has never been referenced since. Amusingly, deciding that any creator who wrote himself into comics continuity was fair game, writer John Ostrander later had 'The Writer' (clearly Morrison) turn up in his Suicide Squad series and promptly killed him off! Nonetheless, having seemingly overcome this small setback, Grant continues to be one of DC's most high profile and well respected writers after more than twenty years.

In 1988 John Constantine, the trench coat-wearing mystic who had been such a pain in Swamp Thing's leafy backside, was granted his own series, Hellblazer (originally, it was to be titled Hellraiser,

IN THAT CASE, YOUR DECISION SEEMS PRETTY OBVIOUS TO ME
THERE ARE 3599 OTHER GREEN LANTERNS IN THE UNIVERSE, HAL— BUT ONLY ONE CAROL FERRIS!
MEANING--?
MEANING GO FOR IT, BUDDY! FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE, LIVE FOR YOURSELF!
DON'T WELL TAKEN MAYBE I SHOULD--
--AARRGHH!!
HEY IF YOU CAN'T STAND THE HEAT, HERO--
- STAY OUT OF THE GYM!!
HM- WHAT DO YOU MAKE THIS STUFF WITH-- NAPALM?
CUT: TO THE SATELLITE HEADQUARTERS OF THE JUSTICE LEAGUE SPINNING IN SINGULAR SPLENDOR SOME 22,300 MILES ABOVE THE EARTH.
--BUT I'M THE LAST PERSON ON EARTH TO GIVE YOU ANY ADVICE RIGHT NOW!
WHY FLASH? YOU'RE ONE OF MY OLDEST FRIENDS.
YOUR OPIN IS IMPORTA TO ME!
I REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR COMING TO ME LIKE THIS, HAL--
LOOK MY OWN LIFE IS SO ROULED UP AT THE MOMENT, I'VE HAD TO ABANDON MY BARRY ALLEN IDENTITY &--
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V FOR VENDETTA
by Alan Moore and David Lloyd
DC

but the Clive Barker movie got there first) written initially by former Captain Britain scripter Jamie Delano (apparently recommended by Alan Moore, Constantine's creator) and drawn by fellow Brit John Ridgway, with Dave McKean supplying painted covers. The series was an immediate hit with readers, who took to the acerbic, chain-smoking and consummately British Constantine, a self-serving 'anti-hero' frequently more concerned with booze, sex and revenge than with justice, as an antidote to DC's more usual fare.

An unlikeable character in many respects (often portrayed as a kind of magical confidence trickster), Constantine was in the early issues, and some later ones, frequently shown to be haunted by the ghosts of various friends he'd gotten killed with his schemes, an army of spectres which seemed to grow larger with each story. Delano used the title as a platform to express his disapproval at the state of Britain in the Eighties, giving it a political dimension that set it apart from most comics of the time.

In the years since Delano's departure numerous writers have come and gone on the series, most of them Brits; notably Garth Ennis (who worked for much of his time on the book in partnership with English artist Steve Dillon) and Mike Carey, who have had one of the longest unbroken runs on the series to date. Others include Paul Jenkins, Warren Ellis, Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, Eddie Campbell, John Smith, Andy Diggle, Peter Milligan and Scottish crime writer Denise Mina. On the art side, in addition to Ridgway and Dillon, Simon Bisley, Mark Buckingham, Jock, John Higgins, David Lloyd, Sean Philips, Steve Pugh, Richard Piers Rayner, Will Simpson and Bryan Talbot have all worked on the book, which seems to have become something of an essential part of every British

comic creator's CV in much the same way every TV actor in the UK eventually seems to turn up in Casualty or The Bill!

Hellblazer continues to run to this day, and while Constantine may be a little older (unlike most American comics characters, the 'laughing magician' seems to age in real time) he's arguably no wiser and certainly no less devious and manipulative. He also stubbornly refuses to become politically correct although, scandalously, when DC Direct issued a Constantine action figure a few years ago, it was hastily withdrawn from sale and then reissued again without its accompanying packet of cigarettes! John would be horrified...

The same year also saw the revival of a fairly obscure 1970s super heroine from *Adventure Comics* in a radically different form, as Neil Gaiman and artist Dave McKean revamped the *Black Orchid*. The background of this enigmatic character, a mistress of disguise who flew around in a strange purple costume, had originally been a total mystery (indeed, that was the principal hook of her short lived series) but Gaiman revealed her to be an artificially created human/plant hybrid with links to the Green, the mystical realm through which Swamp Thing could travel, a rather odd notion which nonetheless caught the imagination of readers.

With the original Orchid (Susan Linden Thorne) having been unceremoniously killed off in this three-part limited series, her 'sister' Flora Black took on the Black Orchid name in a subsequent ongoing title in 1993.

The ongoing Black Orchid series was one of the seven ongoing titles which would form the heart of DC's newest venture - the creation of Vertigo, a line of comics specifically created for mature readers, overseen by editor Karen Berger. The inspiration for the Vertigo line seems to have come directly from the 'British Invasion', Berger having noted that the British writers' work tended to be frequently smarter and edgier than that of the established American creators.

Though Gaiman and McKean had no input into the ongoing Black Orchid series, written by American Dick Foreman, four of the remaining six books in the initial lineup were initially by British writers: Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon's *Hellblazer* (the only one of the seven titles still being published today), *Animal Man* (by now under the stewardship of Jamie Delano), Peter Milligan's *Shade the Changing Man* (actually a radical reinterpretation of a character created by Steve Ditko in the late 1970s) and Neil Gaiman's epic fantasy, *Sandman*. The last two titles in the lineup were Swamp Thing and Doom Patrol, though Alan Moore had by then long since moved on and Grant Morrison departed from Doom Patrol with the last issue not to carry the Vertigo label (though he would later go on to create the hugely successful The Invisibles for Vertigo in 1994).

Only Black Orchid was actually launched as a Vertigo title–the remaining six had all previously existed under the main DC banner, although all of them except Animal Man were by that time carrying the 'Suggested for Mature Readers' warning on the cover. Vertigo was intended to, as Berger put it, "help the medium grow up", and the first wave also included several limited series and one-shots originally intended for Disney's abortive Touchmark line: Peter Milligan and Leicester-based artist Duncan Fegredo's bizarre superhero Enigma, Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell's Sebastian O (about a Victorian assassin) and American writer JM DeMatteis and British artist Paul Johnson's quasi-religious Mercy.

Without a doubt the single most successful and influential of the early Vertigo titles, and indeed one of the most critically-acclaimed comic book series ever, was Neil Gaiman's Sandman, a truly amazing 75-issue long saga which told the story of Dream of the Endless, one of a family of seven immortal beings who are the personifications of Dream, Death, Destiny, Desire, Despair, Delight (who has apparently been driven mad by mankind's corruption and become Delirium) and Destruction (who has given it all up to become an artist).

Destiny had previously appeared as the 'host' of one of DC's mystery books, but the rest were all new creations. Death, in particular (portrayed by Gaiman as a cute Goth girl with a streetwise but kindly attitude) instantly attracted a dedicated fan following and even inspired a bit of a Goth revival! The Sandman's sexy sister has since starred in a number of limited series of her own including Death: the High Cost of Living and Death: the Time of Your Life (the first Death limited series effectively launched the Vertigo range).

Gaiman had originally wanted to write a series about the Sandman character created by Jack Kirby in the 1970s, but his pitch was rejected. Later however, Berger told Gaiman that if he wanted to write a Sandman series he could, providing he created an all-new character. The result was a story which not only created a whole new mythology (the Endless) but also used characters and stories from pretty much every already existing mythology from ancient Egypt to the Norse gods to DC's own established characters (Cain & Abel resurfaced as regulars, the storytellers now revealed as inhabitants of Morpheus's realm, the Dreaming) in a kind of adult fairytale which gained a huge cult following.

By the end of the

story in 1996, Sandman was outselling Superman. It was estimated that half the readership was female (almost unheard of in comics) and that many of them were not otherwise comics' readers at all. Fittingly though, Gaiman did after all get to include Jack Kirby's Sandman in the series; he was revealed to be a deluded ghost tricked by two rogue nightmare creatures (his 'assistants' Brute and Glob), who Dream casually banished from the land of the living (with, as it turned out, serious consequences for himself later on).

The Sandman series has been collected together as a series of ten trade paperbacks which are continuously in print and has spawned numerous spin-offs including, amongst many others, The Dreaming (in which Cain & Abel were major players), Lucifer (written by Mike Carey), Sandman Mystery Theatre (which recounted the adventures of DC's original Sandman of the 1940s) and The Dead Boy Detectives, as well as a novella, Sandman: the Dream Hunters, which was itself eventually adapted into comics form.

DC owns the characters from the series, but out of respect for Gaiman's wishes, no other writer has been allowed to use the character of Morpheus since the series ended. The Sandman remains the only comic book ever to win the World Fantasy Award and is one of only a handful to have made it onto the New York Times Best Seller List (Watchmen was another). The late American novelist, journalist and playwright Norman Mailer described it as 'a comic book for intellectuals'.

Before he became late, obviously.

Gaiman was also responsible for the creation of another character that would star in several Vertigo titles, though he actually started out in a Prestige Format limited series published under the main DC label in 1990-91. The title was The Books of Magic, and the character was Tim Hunter, an English schoolboy who, over the course of the four issues, was effectively taken on an extended tour of the more magical quarters of the DC Universe. His guides were, respectively, the Phantom Stranger (who showed him the history of the magical world), John Constantine (who showed him what was behind the surface of the mundane present day world), Dr Occult (one of DC's earliest established characters, who showed him various magical realms) and the deranged Mr. E (who showed him a possible future).

British artist John Bolton drew the first issue, establishing the look of Tim Hunter (who he apparently based on his own son), while Americans Scott Hampton and Charles Vess drew the two middle chapters, with Paul Johnson providing the final part. At the end of the series, the bespectacled young master Hunter learned that he had it in him to be the world's greatest mage, hence the interest in him displayed by the 'trenchcoat brigade' (as Constantine dubbed himself and his colleagues).

The book was a success and led to an ongoing series by American writer John Ney Rieber, as well as a number of limited series. Gaiman was paid to act as a 'creative consultant' on the ongoing Books of Magic series for the first fifty issues, though he apparently wasn't actually asked to do anything much and most of his input was ignored anyway. He eventually resigned from the position at the same time Rieber quit, but Tim Hunter would continue to appear in Vertigo titles for several years, growing up in the process.

Incidentally, if the idea of a bespectacled boy wizard with a great destiny ahead of him seems vaguely familiar, it should; Tim bears a strong but probably totally coincidental resemblance to Luke Kirby, the boy wizard created for *2000AD* in the strip Summer Magic in 1988! Oh yes, and he also, I'm sure yet again purely coincidentally, bears an even stronger resemblance (even down to the glasses and the pet owl) to a certain Mr. Harry Potter, who took the world by storm a mere seven years after Tim made his debut. Gaiman has said he's sure JK Rowling was unaware of Tim Hunter when she created Potter.

At the other end of the scale, about as far removed from the fairytale worlds of Sandman and Tim Hunter as it's possible to get is Preacher, by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, 66 issues of which were published between 1995 and 2000. The series tells the story of a Texas preacher named Jesse Custer who gains supernatural powers and goes on a self-imposed mission to find God, accompanied by his girlfriend and

LEN WEIN
DAVE GIBBONS
GREEN LANTERN
MY LIFE IS IN RUINS...
AND IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!
I... KNOW
THE NEW
THERE'S NO STOPPING US NOW!
AND IF THAT'S NOT TROUBLE ENOUGH EITHER: SUPERMAN, The FLASH, AND The GREEN ARROW!

a whisky-swilling Irish vampire. Preacher is a darkly comedic and frequently insanely violent story which attracted a fair amount of controversy, though this didn't stop it from becoming one of Vertigo's top sellers. It was partially reprinted in Britain in the *Judge Dredd Megazine* and a film adaptation has been in the works for some time.

Ennis has also written numerous other projects for Vertigo, including the extremely silly but very funny limited series *Adventures in the Rifle Brigade* and its sequel *Operation Bollock* and an updated version of the old DC war title *Unknown Soldier*. Vertigo also reprinted *True Faith*, a serial which Ennis originally created for the British comic *Crisis* in the Eighties, and has more recently revived another old British character, IPC's *Battler Britton* in a five-issue limited series published by DC's WildStorm Comics imprint in 2006. WildStorm, of course, also published the limited series *Albion* by Leah and Alan Moore and John Reppion, which resurrected a horde of other old IPC characters, as well as *Thunderbolt Jaxon*, a five-issue series by Dave Gibbons and John Higgins which reinvented a character from British comic Comet. Both series were published over the course of 2005 and 2006.

There are others, of course–too many to mention. Vertigo continues to be very much a playground for British talent, while Grant Morrison (as mentioned earlier) has gone on to become one of the most respected writers of the mainstream DC Universe titles on such books as *JLA*, *All Star Superman*, *Batman* and *Final Crisis* (he has also continued to contribute to the Vertigo line). In 2006, the Comic Book Resources website voted Morrison the second favourite comic book writer of all time, after Alan Moore. Neil Gaiman came third. Not bad for a bunch of Brits working abroad, eh?

The British influence is alive and well in American comics it seems, and in particular at DC, the company which pretty much started it all. And all of this can be traced back to the Eighties and that bloodless invasion which taught our colonial cousins what we've always known–that comics might still be a cruelly underrated and often despised art form here in Britain, but when it comes to actually creating them, we still do alright. It makes you proud to be British, really (and I am both British and proud of it) to know that even after all these years, we can still beat those uppity Yanks at their own game, given half a chance.

And I'll tell you another thing-he may not have heat vision, but John Constantine was always smart enough to at least know to wear his underpants under his trousers! ●

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SPIRIT OF HOPE

CHARITY ANTHOLOGY
FOR JAPAN AND NEW ZEALAND DISASTER VICTIMS

The British comics community has come together to help raise funds for disaster victims of New Zealand and Japan's earthquakes and tsunami with a stunning new graphic novel anthology, Spirit of Hope.

Comic Book Alliance Chair Tim Pilcher, said, "When the earthquake hit Japan on the afternoon of 11 March 2011 the CBA, like the rest of the world, was stunned. Overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of the disaster we felt impotent to do anything. But standing idly by was simply not an option. So we did what comics people do best, we put a call out to the artistic community and asked for a strip, pin-up or anything that encapsulated that devastating situation for them."

Over 85 writers, artists, colourists, letterers and editors from across the globe all donated their time and work free of charge, to produce a powerful statement, all within an incredible two and a half weeks after the Japanese tsunami hit. Consequently, the stories have a raw emotiveness and impact that can only come from such immediacy. Just a few of the big name contributors include: Nick Abadzis (Laika, Hugo Tate) Mike Collins (Dr. Who), Sean Michael Wilson (AX), Alan Grant (2000AD, Batman) Al Davison (The Spiral Cage, The Minotaur's Tale) Leigh Gallagher (2000AD) Darick Robertson (Transmetropolitan, The Boys) Liam Sharp (Judge Dredd, Gears of War), Peter Hogan (Tom Strong) and Chris Weston (Fantastic Four, The Twelve). Plus, there are moving contributions by manga artists who experienced the Japanese earthquake first hand including, Michiru Morikawa and Akiko Shimojima.

The whole project has been edited by Alan Cowsill.

There are two covers available, a bookshop edition by Jimmy Broxton (Knight & Squire), and a limited edition for comic shops by Michael Allred (Madman, I, Zombie).

Copies of the 112pp book can now be ordered in advance at £14.99 + £3.00 p&p. Please state your preference of cover–Jimmy Broxton or Michael Allred. Advance orders will be sent out and will include three small limited edition prints of the covers and a print by Mark Buckingham (Fables). The address is: The Comic Book Alliance, PO Box 165, Marple, Cheshire SK6 7BL. Cheques & Postal Orders should be made out to 'The Comic Book Alliance'.
The book can also be ordered online at: http://www.comicbook.org.uk/spirit-of-hope/

The book will be on sale from Monday 27 June in all good comic and bookshops.

Further information can be found at the CBA website: www.comicbookalliance.co.uk

All the profits are being donated to the New Zealand Red Cross (www.redcross.org.nz) and Second Harvest in Japan (www.2hj.org).

The full list of contributors in alphabetical order:

Natalie Abadzis
Nick Abadzis
Mike Allred
Jason Atomic
Donna Barr
Jasper Bark
Jimmy Broxton
Adrian Bamforth
Jordie Bellaire
Paul H Birch
Bolt-01
Dan Boultwood
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Richmond Clements
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Vicky Stonebridge
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The Spirit of Hope is being printed by Ukomiks (www.ukomics.co.uk).

If you require hi-res images, or any further information or interviews, please contact:
founders@comicbookalliance.co.uk
or call Tim Pilcher (CBA Chair) on: +44 (0) 7986 995 938.

__Stephen Hooker__ digresses once again and climbs onto his soap-box in an effort to let us know just how he feels about... things!

JUST LIKE WATCHING THE DETECTIVES:

YELLOWKNIFE OF THE YARD

Firstly, I am not going to apologise for 1970s. The decade does not require one.

To get up close and personal for a paragraph or three, the 70s was my journey, from gauche, Tonka toy playing child (and avid fan of the car in the opening credits of The Pink Panther Show); to a bookish; bespectacled; semi-colon overusing; parenthesis obsessed; Stephen King consuming; teenager. Still gauche, of course, but by surrounding myself with fellow comic collectors, no one in the group noticed.

Secondly, I read more comics in those ten years than any decade since. And, on a sad note, IPC's blood bath that was *Action*, would be the last UK comic to grab my reading attention before I shamelessly defected to the Bronze Age of American Comics. The only era in US comics that ever really mattered. And I'll arm wrestle anyone who says otherwise! But do please form an orderly queue.

But, you know–earlier than usual–I digress.

To paraphrase Woody Allen's opening monologue from *Manhattan* (1979): The 70s was my decade and it always would be. Cue twin laser beams down London's Oxford Street (you mean you weren't there for that momentous event?) and drop Slade's 'How Does It Feel' on the turntable! Summon the montage of black and white footage of the 1970s!

However, I loathe the misrepresentation of the 70s by some historians and the low-rent television experts who have, over the proceeding decades, systematically boiled the 1970s down to a simplistic, mind-sodermising, parade of Mud's *Tiger Feet*, Are You Being Served, flares, the Space Hopper, platform shoes, perms,

ART BY DOUGLAS MAXTED

and The Brotherhood Of Man.

So, the 70s have become something of a misinformed joke, where the deluded can laugh at its alleged naffness, as they, in turn, yell into their overpriced (and over here) imobile, ismart, ilookridiculous phones, twitter to people only slightly less boring than themselves, book their smug faces on the internet, idle away hours voting for the best slice of banality on Strictly Come Fame Academy X Ray Factor and binge drink their way to an early demise (although, annoyingly, never, ever, early enough).

Now, before I book my final holiday destination on a Grumpy Old Man, All You Can Moan at, Cruise–a ship I fear, for me anyway, will be leaving soon–there was a lot more to the 70s than laziness would have us believe.

The 1970s were a bumper decade for television imports from the USA. Consequently, it was wall-to-wall Americana in our house, a welcome antidote to the domestic offerings of *George and Mildred*, *Dixon Of Dock Green* and that major contribution to race relations, *Love Thy Neighbour*.

There was one particular type of US television show that held our attention spans: the US detective series, which reached its zenith in the 70s.

The gods of the detective genre were like extended family, Uncle William Conrad as Frank Cannon (ahead, it would appear, of the curve, in the obesity epidemic); Raymond Burr's *A Man Called Ironside* (he electrocuted one villain in an episode that remains lodged in my mind for no other reason than the childhood trauma it evoked); the underrated David Janssen in *Harry O* (finally free from *The Fugitive*); a pre *Hulk* Bill Bixby in *The Magician*; the seductive *Banacek*, fresh from a slap up Breakfast at Tiffany's; the semi-serious *Rockford Files*. And, the Zeus of them all, the dishevelled, the perspective challenged (you know, one glass eye, depth of field issues), knew

who the killer was from the off, but never made it boring (not with those 70s interiors anyway), Peter Falk's, relentless, dry-cleaner shy, car wreck driving, *Columbo*.

Now I'm sure all this detective shenanigans, did not go unnoticed by the editors of *Valiant* and *Lion*. And whilst I was enjoying my fix of regular stalwarts, a new (well, new to me) face appeared in its pages on 17 August 1974, slotted between *Kid Pharaoh* and *Mowser The Priceless Puss* (a sort of ridiculous to the sublime), was one *Yellowknife of The Yard*. Complete with an atypical *Valiant* and *Lion* text heading: Look Chums! A Guest Appearance By An Old 'Valiant' Favourite.

I was smitten.

Partly because there were only two other Native American Indians that had ever impinged on my life. The affable *Little Plum* from *The Beano*; likable situation comedy that I had outgrown by 1974 and *The Lone Ranger*'s team mate Tonto, who felt more like an adjunct of the Ranger than an actual character.

Yellowknife, though, felt like a step up from nicety and side-kick status. Sure, his back story was slender, the son of a Sioux Chief, who somehow found himself adrift in an exchange scheme between British and US police departments and ended up at Scotland Yard. Note not New Scotland Yard, that name change did not occur until 1967, which may indicate that *Yellowknife of the Yard* was pre that date.

Although more realistic than *Little Plum*, there was still a fair amount of comedy to be extracted from the situation but not always at, as the fish out of water, Yellowknife's, expense. His superior was the long-suffering Chief Superintendent Snide and Yellowknife's able (if able means slightly inept) assistant was Sergeant Bumble, a round semi-serious character who played funny man to Yellowknife's straight man.

Furthermore, Snide openly despaired of the investigation techniques of the Native American and all the trappings of the culture Yellowknife brought with him, the teepee over his desk, the constant war dance celebrations after solved cases. Snide was often than not left in exasperation at Yellowknife's antics, as he attempted to reconcile proper police procedure with the investigation techniques of the Wild West.

The two part story concluded in the following weeks *Valiant* and *Lion* (31 August 1974), had Yellowknife and Sergeant Bumble scrutinizing possible

extortion at Dietmoor Health Farm, where overweight business men were losing (as Snide informs Yellowknife) more than just a few pounds! Chortle, chortle! It does not take Yellowknife and Bumble to rumble the game and the crooks are swiftly brought to justice (it's a fair cop and all that). Where the reader was also informed: It's farewell to the Sioux sleuth for the time being.

No doubt required filler from the *Valiant* vaults, as *House Of Dolmann* maked a similar 'guest appearance' in the following issue. As swift as his appearance was, Yellowknife of The Yard made its mark on my memory.

Okay, *Yellowknife* was of its time, (pre 1967), so it does not address the cultural differences very well, certainly not by modern standards. Yellowknife did say "um" a lot and his speech was marked by a Hollywood take on how Native North American Indians might attempt English; short sentences, no connectives and, for added realism, no commas. Most telling of all though was the deployment of the pejorative descriptive: redskin.

However, this is no reason to abandon the series.

Personally, the most shocking aspect of George Orwell's *1984* was Weston Smith's job. Day in and day out he would check social history and if it did not fit in with the current party line he eradicated it from existence for all time.

Let's not do that, comics should be viewed in an historical context, from the time they were produced in. I will end here on the opening line from L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*: 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.' ●

Sparky

THE 'FORGOTTEN' COMIC

The Sparky *comic doesn't share the same celebrity as many of its DC Thomson contemporaries. When remembered, it is thought of as the 'odd-man-out' in the stable of DCT 'fun' comics. But this was perhaps why so many of us loved it:* Sparky *provided a mixture of fun, adventure, and surrealism that no other comic quite matched.*
In this article **Alan Smith** *tells us why...*

It was the last of the DC Thomson five 'fun' titles to appear (23 January 1965), and the first to founder (16 July 1977). The comic was set up by the Boys' and Girls' comic department of DC Thomson, rather than the juvenile department from which the *Dandy*, *Beano*, *Topper* and *Beezer* originated.

The comic had a different look to its strips, as many of the artists had not worked on the sister 'fun' papers; the first editor, Willie (Bill) Mann, had previously helmed 'Victor'.

Sparky carried 'fun' strips, but also strips that featured surrealistic themes not seen in the other DC Thomson stable of comics. There was also a high preponderance of animal-themed adventure strips, and space-themed strips. The comic also ran a text (with some illustrations) strip for

its first few months, and in later years there were also some book adaptations. But it was the outlandish stories and free gifts that made *Sparky* stand out.

Sparky No. 1 entered the market in January 1965. It had been advertised just after New Year's Day 1965 on TV, with a free gift, the 'Flying Snorter'. This was a yellow balloon that rasped away loudly–what child could resist?

My Mum bought me the new comic when I was eight years old, and I can affirm that the 'Snorter' was great fun indeed! Anyhow, this was the start of a long and happy association for me with *Sparky* comic. In fact, I bought all but four Sparky's (and kept them) to about June 1971.

At a cost of 5d (old pence), it was 2d dearer than *Dandy* or *Beano*, but it had a page content of 24 pages instead of 16. The comic was aimed at a slightly younger readership than *Dandy* or *Beano* for the first three or so years of its life.

At the time, I didn't know *Sparky* both reprinted old 1940s strip and conceived new adventures using old characters! The comic was also a repository for updated versions of old *Beano* and *Dandy* strips such as Pansy Potter, Keyhole Kate, Ma Jolly and her Brolly, Hungry Horace, Freddie the Fearless Fly, Frosty McNab, Black Jack the Sweep, Dick Turpentine, Peter Piper, Hairy Dan, etc.

I was quite happy with it anyway, and begged my Mum to keep buying it. By 1967, I was buying the comic (and *Dandy*, *Pow*, & *Smash*) with my pocket money. Friday was *Sparky* day, and after school, I would have my tea, change out of my school clothes, and then dash to my local newsagents (with my street clothes on of course!) for my *Sparky*.

The first few months of the comics life saw the unusual mode of 'strip rotation' which meant that manystrips were taking turns to appear. The comic certainly went through a heavy turnover of stories, both semi-serious and purely fun strips; it seemed to be struggling for continuity - and readership! No wonder the comic struggled early on, as it was difficult to get readership identification with characters if they didn't appear every week! The comic seemed to be the 'oddball' of the Thomson output, struggling to find an identity or a loyal readership. Over its lifetime, there were several 'revamps' to the comic, with cover changes, story placement changes, and even some stories changing from colour to B&W or vice versa. Despite serving up such interesting offerings (to me at least!) the comic stuggled, resulting in many promotions taking place; *Sparky* probably gave away more free gifts 1965 to 1969 than any other Thomson comic in this period.

Some sources have described the comic as having a 'twee' or 'fey' slant to its early years. It wasn't without some real-life type violence, though: for example, 'The Kidnapped Kidds' portrayed quite graphically the kidnapping of two children, witnesses to a train robbery (see *Crikey!* 2). The gang leader, Gus, in one issue hit the young boy savagely across the face! When surrounded by Police in the finale, Gus put gun to the children's head and threatened to shoot. The comic never ever again repeated such scenes; my guess being letters from concerned parents!

Following is a selection of some of the best, worst, and most bizarre of the *Sparky* stories–along with *Sparky*'s history.

Dreamy Dave and Dozy Dora was a fun strip that inhabited the two centre colour pages, and produced some of the best and innovative surreal stories I have ever seen in any comic. Storylines included a rocket trip to the centre of the earth, visits to the places where time and weather are made, trips to a mirror world, to the land of lost children, and other strange dimensions.

Will O' the Well was a bizarre effort about a pixie-like boy who lived at the bottom of a wishing well (and never got wet!). People

SPARKY UNDERWENT SEVERAL COSMETIC CHANGES DURING IT'S LIFESPAN. THE EVER CHANGING LOGO BEING THE MOST OBVIOUS...

THE LONELY LAD OF BLUE LAGOON
Packed with fun, thrills and action—Sparky means satisfaction!
TARGET TIDDLEY-WINKS!
Sparky
September 30th, 1967.
AHA!
DON'T FORGET MY TIN OPENER !!!
AH, YES!
AH, GOOD!
I'M OFF FOR A WEEKEND CAMP ! IT WON'T BE MUCH FUN BUT I'VE GOT A PRIZE IF I CAN REMEMBER THIS TIME !!!
OH, NO! THIS TIME I'VE FORGOTTEN THE TINS!

dropping coins to make a wish got their wishes granted via Will's intervention (always unknown to them). Those wishing unselfishly on behalf of others fared best, while those wishing with selfish or cruel intentions got their wish, but in a manner that taught them a lesson! Will spent all money 'earned' on ice lollies; I'm not sure what lesson this taught. Lessons aside, it was a very inventive series and an early favourite of mine.

The Moonsters lived on the moon (obviously), but it soon became obvious this Moon had oceans, forests, and many other similarities to Earth. However, until the late 60s 'space-race', this lack of scientific accuracy didn't matter much!

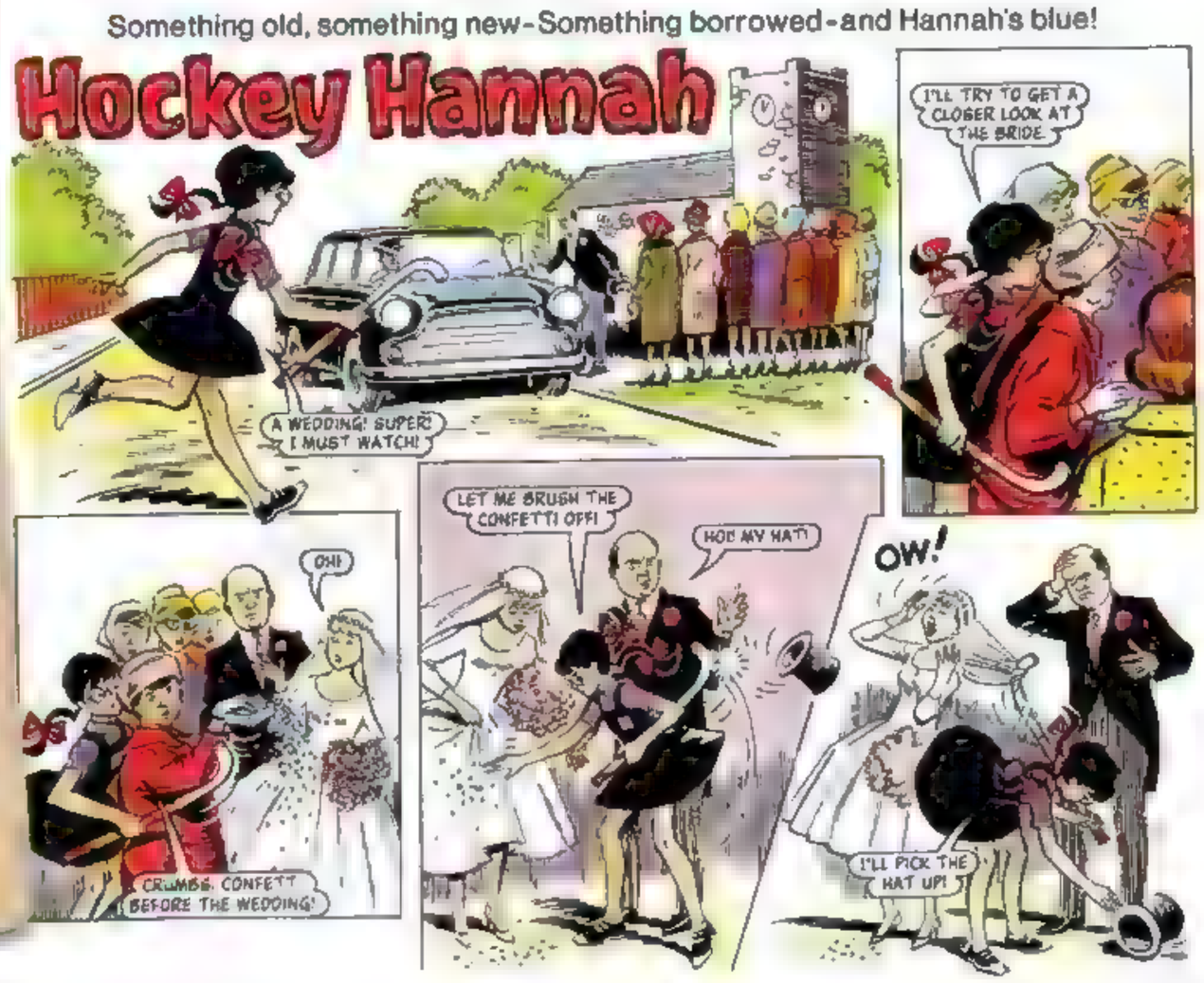
In the summer of 1966, the comic presented the first series of what would become a regular favourite character in the comic over its lifetime, 'Klanky'. Klanky had been sent to Earth by his creators to 'help mankind'. This he did most ably, often thwarting various wrongdoers in his adventures. He befriended the Huggins family, in particular youngsters Ernie and Sis. The Klanky strip did sometimes become repetitive, but never on the scale that the excruciating 'Invisible Dick' did! (more on this later).

A truly entrancing strip was *Willie the Woeful Wizard*. This was not innovative, as magic-based stories were common in fun comics, but the artwork and plots were superb!

Bill Mainwaering drew the strip to finely detailed precision, which complemented the surreal flavour of the storylines. I can honestly state that in my opinion Bill Mainwaerings artwork on the 'Willy' strip is the finest I have ever seen in any 'fun' comic. Yes, I adored this strip with its delightfully bizarre nature, and wrote my first letter to the comic in March 1967 saying how much I did. The result being the following month, the strip ended forever. Ah well... so much for reader feedback!

One moment of utter, unequalled surrealism was the arrival in 1967 of *Granny Cupp and her Flying Saucer*. This was truly mind-bending stuff. One day a flying saucer from Mars landed in Granny Cupp's garden due to control trouble. While the Martians carried out repairs, Granny served the creatures cups of tea with cake and biscuits. The craft was soon repaired, and the friendly fellows left Granny a small saucer in gratitude. The saucer had many devices which helped Granny quite a bit, and got her into some scrapes too. Quite the weirdest adventure came when Granny accidentally thwarted an attempted South American junta! I can't do it justice in words; it has to

(LEFT): THE NOW HIGHLY UN-PC SPARKY STRIP
(BELOW): HOCKEY HANNAH


Something old, something new - Something borrowed - and Hannah's blue!
Hockey Hannah
I'LL TRY TO GET A CLOSER LOOK AT THE BRIDE
A WEDDING! SUPER! I MUST WATCH!
OH!
CRUMBS. CONFETTI BEFORE THE WEDDING!
LET ME BRUSH THE CONFETTI OFF!
HOD MY HAT!
OW!
I'LL PICK THE HAT UP!

be seen to be believed.

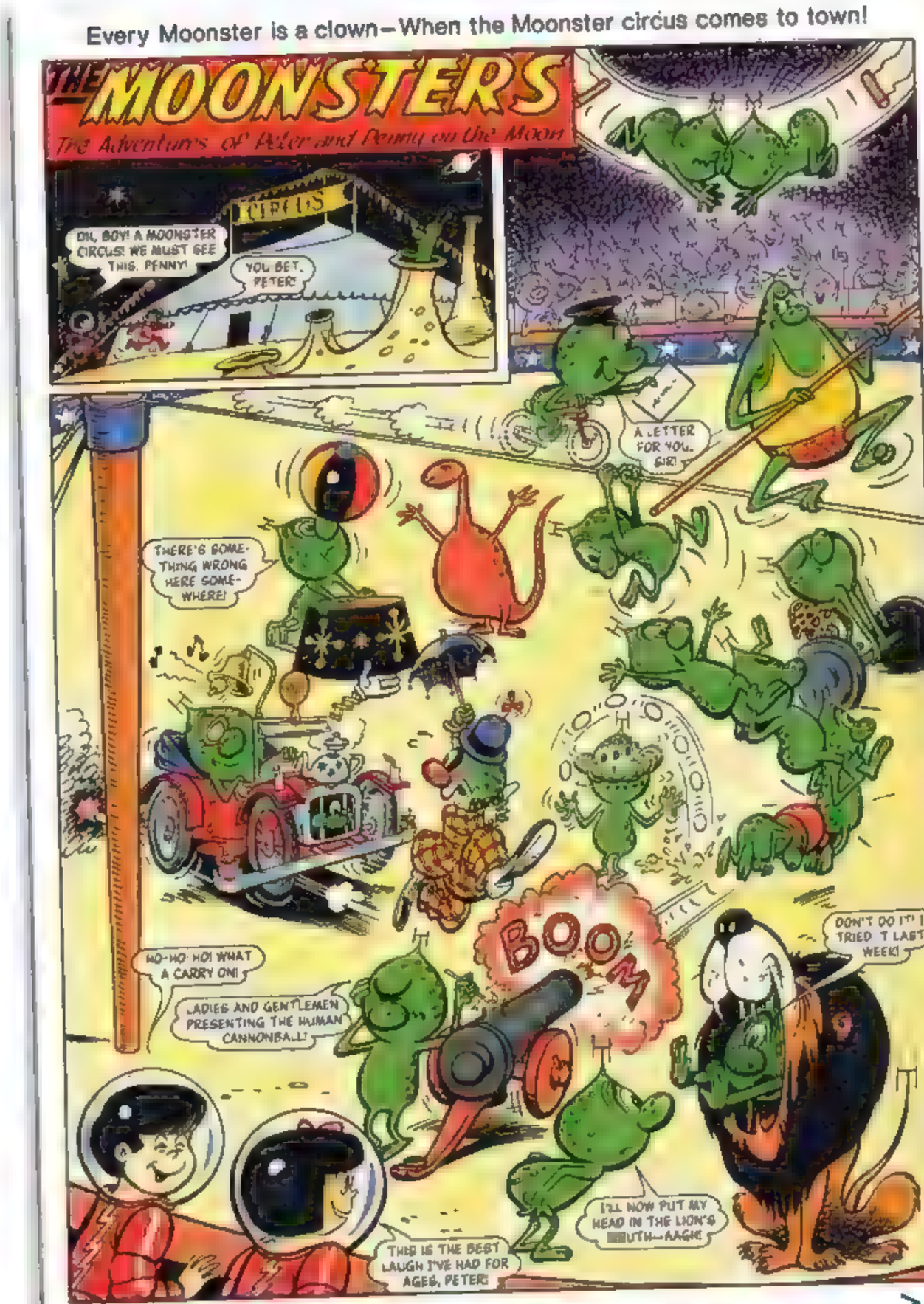
A very black day for me came in 1967, with the start of the long running *Invisible Dick* strip. This had been another very old strip given a contemporary look. Dick Dickson's Dad gave him a torch that made all it shone its black beam on invisible. That's the sum of it, really. For me, this became quite easily the most mind-numbingly boring strip in Sparky's (and any other comic's) entire history. In an angry letter to Thomsons in 1971, I accused the comic of 'conning' its readers with this strip. I stated that every storyline was the same as the week before, and that whoever got paid for writing it was on easy money for doing nothing. I still hold that view!

The *Sparky* comic always seemed to struggle, and as a result, many changes took place. Three new writers joined in 1967: Gordon Cook, Mike Baird, and Peter Clark. Clark would pen the very finest *I.Spy* stories, from 1969 to 1971 (more on this strip later). Also mong this set of changes were another couple of weeks of free gifts and more new 'fun pals'...

The most famous of these was *Deputy Dawg*. The cartoon series had been a big success on the telly, so the comic gave a comic strip version a run out. A very puzzling move for *Sparky* comic as this was the only time they encroached onto 'TV Comic's territory. Sadly, the comic version never matched the TV series, and was soon dropped.

In 1968, Ian Chisolm took over editorship of *Sparky* from Bill Mann. Chisolm obviously decided that the comic needed another drastic overhaul. For me, one of the changes was traumatic: the end of the *Moonsters* strip. Though I had never found the strip more

(BELOW): THE MOONSTERS-HARDLY A CONDENDER FOR MOST REALISTIC SF STRIP!


Every Moonster is a clown—When the Moonster circus comes to town!
THE MOONSTERS
The Adventures of Peter and Penny on the Moon
CIRCUS
OH, BOY! A MOONSTER CIRCUS! WE MUST SEE THIS, PENNY!
YOU BET, PETER!
A LETTER FOR YOU, SIR!
THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG HERE SOMEWHERE!
DON'T DO IT! I TRIED IT LAST WEEK!
BOOM
HO-HO-HO! WHAT A CARRY ON!
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN PRESENTING THE HUMAN CANNONBALL!
I'LL NOW PUT MY HEAD IN THE LION'S MOUTH—AAGH!
THIS IS THE BEST LAUGH I'VE HAD FOR AGES, PETER!

Sparky
No. 116—April 8th, 1967. PRICE 5d
Meet the Pin men—They're really sharp.
It's 007—The circular secret agent.
NEXT WEEK—Meet the Prince of Pancakes.

Goldie
THERE'S THE SHIP, DAD, DRIVEN BROADSIDE ON TO THE SHORE!
THE COASTGUARDS ARE ALREADY HERE WITH LIFE SAVING APPARATUS.
Steve and Betty Martin, children of P C Harry Martin lived in the village of Dencombe, on Exmoor. They had a golden eagle called Goldie, as a pet and took it with them wherever they went. One day, during a violent storm, news came of a shipwreck on the rocky coast near Dencombe. P C Martin let the children come with him as he hurried to the scene
THEY'RE GOING TO FIRE A ROCKET, BETTY!
WHAT'S THAT MAN DOING ON THE DECK? HE ISN'T SAFE THERE
The Slowdown train turns out to be— Part of Dick's lost property!
SLOWDOWN EXPRESS
GIVE HIM THE AND TELL HIM
SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT IT MIGHT BE WORTH TRYING.
DAVID
PARKY
I CURE'EM DOCTOR
PA-RA!
BOOM! CHAK!
RAT-TAT! TAT-A TAT!

than vaguely amusing, I felt a pang of sorrow when realising they would be gone forever. I have a theory as to why the Moonsters were terminated: by mid 1968, the upcoming Apollo moon shots were very much in the news. People (and children) were becoming educated via television as to what conditions on Earth's natural satellite were like. I think the strip ended because it was so at odds with reality, and though just a 'fun strip', was possibly seen as interfering with childrens perception of a real-life, historical event!

And soon came the final *Dreamy Dave and Dozy Dora* adventure, which was again like saying goodbye to an old friend. In truth though, the strip had become extremely repetitive, with only small variations on the same storyline–a far cry from its truly innovative early days.

The strip 'L Cars' replaced *Dave and Dora*. Based loosely on the TV series 'Z Cars', it lasted right through to the comic's final edition in July 1977.

A huge *Sparky* favourite was the aforementioned *I.Spy*. This was loosely based on the Odhams/IPC character 'The Cloak', which ran in 'Pow' from about 1967 to 1969. Unlike the Cloak, *I.Spy* never revealed his face, and his assortment of devices within his suit became far more elaborate (and larger) than Cloak's ever were!

The first series ended dramatically when *I.Spy* was seemingly destroyed along with the villainous gang he was up against. Readers flooded the editorial office with demanding letters! (I was one such distraught I. Spy fan.)

The comic never really had any intention of killing him off, but it made for a great cliff-hanger! *I.Spy* returned in October 1970, expanded to three pages–virtually unheard of for a 'fun' strip.

More changes came along: in 1969, *Klanky* took a rest to be replaced by *Mr Bubbles*. Mr Bubbles was a 'Bottle Imp' who lived inside a modern day plastic washing up bottle. Anyone who squeezed his bottle (that does sound strange!) got three wishes. They usually regretted the first two wishes and returned the status quo with wish number three.

One of the more inventive new fun pals was *Ali and his Baba* (later to be just *Ali's Baba*). This concerned the adventures of a young toddler called 'Baba'. Nothing unusual there... but! Baba had a invisible 'bodyguard' the 'Ali' of the title. Ali was invisible to all, even Baba, and existed on a small cloud floating a few feet above ground. Ali was always busy preventing Baba from getting into trouble... well,

most of the time! Also new in 1970 was *I.Fly*. An update of 'Freddie the Fearless Fly' and with a titular nod to the immensely popular 'I. Spy', I. Fly was constantly hunted by his nemesis 'Spider'. Spider was a really repulsive character (whom my ten year old sister was scared of)!

Thingummyblob was a fantastically funny strip. Professor T. Potts had condensed the 'elixir of life' into a few drops of liquid. While rushing to phone the scientific institute, he tripped and the phial containing the elixir flew into a partially filled (with water) fire bucket. There came a hissing of steam and up popped the blobby 'Thingummyblob'. Horrified, the professor tried to get rid of it, but no luck–it was indestructible! Each week saw many an effort by Potts to lose or destroy the friendly 'blob' creature. The creature never spoke, but had some intelligence, often becoming aware when Potts was about to try the latest in a long line of unsuccessful attempts to dispose of it. For me, this was the last real success the comic produced.

By late 1976, however, almost half of the comic consisted of repeats of old strips. Was this conning the readers? For long-term readers, it certainly was. By 1977, *Sparky* was almost dead on its feet. The market for comics had been shrinking throughout the 1970s, and for *Sparky*, the end was soon to come. And on 16 July 1977, issue 652, it did. Well... not quite all! An announcement on page 11 sounded the news that some *Sparky* favourites were moving to the new 'Topper and Sparky' comic.

The following week, in what was an innovative move, *Topper and Sparky* comic had a fold up pull-out insert, which when folded, read like a small magazine. In this insert were *Sparky* strips, 'Puss and Boots', 'Ali's Baba' 'Hungry Horace' 'We are the Sparky People' 'Thingummyblob' and 'L Cars'. This insert lasted until 1981; after this date, only 'Hungry Horace', 'Peter Piper', and 'Ali's Baba' continued in the pages of *Topper*.

Other *Sparky* alumni made appearances in other comics, too: a new Thomson comic *Champ* appeared in 1984, featuring a new *I.Spy* strip. *Peter Piper* made a few appearances in the *Dandy*, but drawn radically differently. Ali's Baba became *Johnnie's Genie* in *Dandy* for a while. *Sparky*'s greatest success, *Puss and Boots*, transferred to *Dandy* in 1993 as *Moggy and Mutt* (later reverting back to *Puss and Boots* to see their days out in the *Dandy* up to 2000). The great news that Puss and Boots have only just re-emerged in the *Dandy* means that happily, a little bit of *Sparky* comic still lives on.

And if only the *I.Spy* strip could be resuscitated, then this comic fan would be very happy indeed!

The *Sparky* comic led an eventful twelve year lifespan. Its early years were a mixture of surreal fantasy and animal-based stories, and then, from 1969, it moved to a more 'whacky' style, but still never really gained a large readership. For fans of free gifts, however, it was the perfect comic, having more promotions during its tenure than any similar D.C Thomson comic! And then, of course, there will always be the memory of a granny thwarting a South American junta...

Who can top that? ●

A POCKETFUL OF MEMORIES

CRANSTON MCMILLAN

Top Sellers *Pocket Chiller Library* from the early 1970's remains one of the most collectable of digest-sized comic books. Still commanding high prices when issues turn up, Chiller's longevity is quite amazing, especially as it is not so long back that they were considered totally worthless. Whilst many collectors and Comic addicts are familiar with the horror series, few pay attention to the other titles in the pocket library series. Successful enough at the time, War, Western, Detective and Romance are seen very much as poor relations to Pocket Chiller, so its worth taking a little while to look back here at the 4 individual titles in the series.

Chiller's four companion titles enjoyed the same patchy distribution as the jolly horror digest and in the case of War and Western, the numbering sequence leads to confusion as both series stopped and then suddenly started from issue 1 again. The pocket libraries inhabited the same rack as *Commando*, but were never as popular. One only needs to look at the absolute plethora of old *Commando* comics for sale on the internet and at the few second hand book and comic shops that still exist, and compare the total to the meagre offerings of the Top Sellers series, to see that these are few and far between nowadays

Pocket Detective Library remains the closest in content to the all-powerful *Chiller*, but without the overt supernatural and outright horror elements. That is not to say that Detective is any the weaker for that fact, just the opposite really as *Pocket Detective* is easily the most rewarding of the companion titles, and manages to stamp out an identity of its own quite admirably. James Bond type villains with undersea bases, nefarious plots to rule the world, diamond heists, gold bullion robberies, Nazi scientists bent on global destruction were all par for the course.

Madman's Dream is an excellent early example of Detective at its best. Starting off in a fairly run of the mill fashion with bodies turning up marked with a small crab symbol the story soon builds up to a thrilling battle with a megalomaniac intent on raiding and taking over an army missile base, with of course the obvious intention of world domination. Throw in a *Thunderball*esque climatic undersea battle, and all the ingredients are there for a super little tale that still stands up quite nicely.

Island of Terror is another recommended title. This one involves a special agent and his sexy female assistant investigating odd happenings on a small island off the South American coast. Child kidnapping, bribery and eventually an undersea cave where a fortune in Nazi loot has been hidden form a cracking yarn. Well worth looking for. As is the completely off base *Is Hitler Alive?*, a real humdinger of a title, and a crazy story if ever there was one.

Pocket War Library lasting more than 200 issue enjoyed the longest run of any of the *Pocket Library* series, and is probably down to British boys in the seventies love for

POCKET DETECTIVE, CHILLER & WAR ARTWORK BY ALAN WILLOW. HAMMER ARTWORK (FAR RIGHT) BY BRIAN LEWIS

SHE FLUNG A STONE INTO THE BUSHES SOME DISTANCE AWAY
WHAT WAS THAT...?
MANDY PRAYED THAT THE GUARD WOULD NOT LOOK ROUND...
CY LACKLY CALMED THE FRIGHTENED HOLIDAYMAKERS.
WE'LL ALL BE BURNED ALIVE! SAVE US. SAVE US!
THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR. THE CAPTAIN WILL STEER ROUND IT
E'S FACE WAS HARD.
SOMEONE POURED OIL ON THE WATER AND SET FIRE TO IT TO FRIGHTEN THEM. THERE COULD BE A SKIN DIVER SOMEWHERE AROUND...
THE LAUNCH SPED SWIFTLY OVER THE SURFACE. TEN MINUTES PASSED AND THEN CLOSE TO THE BEACH...
THERE HE IS... I'LL SLIP ASHORE FARTHER UP AND GRAB THE BLIGHTER.
6p No 1
Pocket DETECTIVE Library
MADMAN'S DREAM

War/Action stories rather than the quality of the comics themselves. *Pocket War*, outside of some wonderful cover artwork is a very lame imitation of *Commando* and the Fleetway library titles.

War comics in digest format had been immensely popular in Britain since the introduction of Fleetway's *War Picture Library* in 1958. The innovative comic book spawned an absolute plethora of imitators: *Air Ace*, *War at Sea*, *Battleground*, *Battle*, *Sea War* and of course the most famous of them all, *Commando* to name but a few.

Pocket War obviously arriving late in the day added little to the subject, a great many of the stories are hackneyed, and at best throwaway, some reprinted from the earlier *Battlecry* digest, one thing that War does have in its favour is some of the totally stunning paintings on the covers, especially on some of the early stories such as *Escape from Crete* and *Devastation*. If I was to pick only one issue as an example of the series at its best, then I would have to plump for *Death and Destruction*, a little belter of a story hiding behind a rather nondescript title and cover. Here we have a soldier who can feel no emotion whatsoever due to the fact that he has sacrificed his family for a far greater good; a poignant adult tale that deserves to be sought out. It does remain though a small glimmer of light in a very dark tunnel.

Pocket Romance Library for so many guys was the title to avoid, and the weakest performer of the range, this did not stop *Romance* having just as long a run as *Chiller*. These however are few and far between nowadays, as being aimed at the female market they were not collected with the same fervour as the male orientated titles. A bit of a shame really as the couple that I did read had a rather nice European feel, one offering a truly downbeat ending which was something unheard of in the rather play safe, happy endings world of *Star Picture Library* and Fleetway's *Love Story*. This one remains however a hard title to assess due to the general unavailability of old issues.

Pocket Western Library was a rather awkward title that never seemed to live up to the promises of some great titles and attractive cover art. One of the main problems was that it never seemed to challenge the stereotypical image of the American western. The Italian made Western films of the 1960's and 70's had changed in many people's minds the whole concept of the genre. There were no more clear defining lines between the good guys and the bad guys; the anti hero had been born, and audiences lapped up the adventures of *The Man with No Name*, *Django* & *Sabata*, preferring the gritty realism, wild soundtracks and wayward plotting that was to become the trademark of the milieu to the watered down Hollywood offerings. Comics were initially slow to pick up on these changes. In American comic books of the time it was simply business as usual, and in Britain the few comic digests seemed to be targeted at the Louis L'Amour/ Zane Gray readership. *Pecos Bill*, *Cowboy Adventure Library*, *Western Picture Library* are at the very best ordinary, and sadly *Pocket Western* falls very much into the same category. Some nice issues to look out for are The Boy from France, Drifter, Sure Prey, and the spaghetti western sounding Drop That Gun Gringo.

So a rather uneven hotchpotch of genres and styles, each title have many strengths but equally as many weaknesses. All in all however these are worthwhile comics that deserve a look, although none of the titles have the same allure or collectability as *Chiller*. Being selective one can amass a nice little bundle of issues that are attractive and a worthwhile addition to any collection. Excellent condition examples remain in short supply, although it is far easier to pick up odd issues of War, Western, and Detective for around a couple of pounds than it is to find issues of the increasingly elusive *Pocket Chiller*. So, if you happen to find a few of these don't turn up your nose, give them a try, they won't change your perception of comics in any way, but will provide a little light hearted nostalgic entertainment, and that can't be too bad. ●

Hero or villain? Peacekeeper or mercenary psychopath? You decide–just don't call him a bounty hunter. He's a freelance peacekeeping agent, damn it! He is, of course …

KEEPING THE PEACE, WITH VIOLENCE

BY TONY INGRAM

Seven feet of armored steel with horns, an arsenal of high tech weapons and absolutely no sense of humor may not seem a likely description for the hero of a Sci–Fi comedy strip, but then, Deaths Head (DH to his friends, if he had any) is not your traditional hero. The slightly psychotic Freelance Peacekeeping Agent (*never* call him a bounty hunter!) debuted in 1986 in a single page strip called "High Noon Tex", set on an unnamed planet, in which he tricked a robotic cowboy into blowing himself up. This rather pointless strip, by Deaths Head's co–creator Simon Furman and artist Bryan Hitch, appeared in several Marvel UK titles simultaneously, and was apparently published purely to secure copyright on DH–a necessary step, since his real introduction would be in the pages of a licensed title, the British version of *Transformers* (#113), based on Hasbro's popular toy line. Created by Transformers writer Furman and artist Geoff Senior, DH was dropped straight into the middle of the endless war between the heroic Autobots and the evil Decepticons (who'd have been hard pressed to be anything but evil with a name like that) without even the benefit of an origin story. Still, his laconic manner, odd appearance and quirky characteristics (like ending every sentence with an interrogative "yes", yes?) made him an instant hit with readers. Violent, amoral and somehow utterly impossible to dislike, the mad Mechanoid with the deadpan delivery became a regular in the weekly *Transformers* strip through #151, before being flung off into the space–time continuum.

DEATH'S HEAD #1, MARCH 1989

Deaths Head reappeared in the unlikely setting off another licensed strip, in *Doctor Who Magazine* #135. In this eight page story, again by Furman and Senior, DH–giant sized when we last saw him, to fit in with the *Transformers* characters–was shrunk to human proportions by the devious Doctor (who he had tried to kill) and sent to Earth in the year 8162AD; in an uncharacteristically callous dismissal, the Doctor's parting remark is "a pity. It was my favourite planet!"

Dragons Claws #5 (Feb 1989) picked up DH's story as he landed in the urban hellhole known as The Pool (by implication, Liverpool) in the 82nd Century, finally becoming a part of the Marvel Universe…or at least, that slightly peculiar backwater of it in which the

Marvel UK characters toiled in relative obscurity. Though nothing much happens in the story, the huge back cover blurb on the previous issue is a clear indication that Marvel had high hopes for the character and were actively promoting him, and sure enough, the next month saw the publication of *Deaths Head* #1, by Furman and Bryan Hitch.

Deaths Head's solo series established a new status quo for the character as DH, given a makeover by his unwanted new partner, obnoxious mechanic Spratt (who had rebuilt him after *Dragons Claws* dropped a building on him) began to take on new clients. Hitch's cartoony art was perfectly suited to the quirky, comedic feel of the strip, which went from one crazy situation to another as DH and Spratt took on Dragons Claws again, then relocated to Los Angeles, were hijacked by animal rights activists, delivered an explosive birthday cake to a gangster (DH–seven feet tall, with horns, remember–dresses up in a butlers uniform and blond wig for the job) and encountered foes such as gang boss The Undertaker, the monstrous Plaguedog and hit man Big Shot (who would become his archenemy). Unfortunately, from #4, the flow of the book was somewhat spoiled by a succession of changes of artist, first Lee Sullivan, then John Higgins and, with #6, Liam Sharp filling in

TOP RIGHT: 'HIGH NOON TEX', THE ORIGINAL DEATH'S HEAD STRIP BY SIMON FURMAN AND BRYAN HITCH

for Hitch. Furman and Hitch's #7 is the weakest of the series, though we do meet a previously mentioned recurring character, gang boss Dead Cert, in the flesh for the first time. Fittingly, he has the head of a horse, prompting a succession of witty exchanges ("You're backing a winner, Dead Cert". "Are you trying to be funny?" "No, I wouldn't horse around with you.").

Deaths Head #8–drawn by Art Wetherel–featured a rematch with the Doctor (the only time the Time Lord has made an 'official' appearance in a Marvel Universe title) and is written by Steve Parkhouse, a former writer of the Doctor Who strip and creator of the villain of the piece, the Doctor's old foe Josiah W Dogbolter. Furman and Senior returned for #9, in which DH interacts with the US Marvel Universe for the first time, the Doctor having dropped him off at the headquarters of the Fantastic Four at the end of #8. And in #10, with Hitch back on the art, DH is sent back to the future by Reed Richards only to mistakenly end up in the year 2020AD, tangling with Arno Stark, that era's Iron Man!

Unfortunately though, DH's assimilation into the Marvel Universe proper came too late to save the book, which was unceremoniously cancelled with this issue without warning or explanation. Presumably, low sales were to blame, though in late 1990 DH returned in a graphic novel–'The Body in Question'–which gave him an origin at last (also serialized in the magazine 'Strip'!, #'s13–20), establishing that he had been created by the evil 'technomagus' Lupex and his lover, Pyra, before gaining his freedom; this was a direct contradiction of hints in his early appearances that he was created as a rich mans toy in 2003, though the discrepancy was explained away by saying that Death's Head's memories had been tampered with to make him unaware of his true origins.

BELOW: DH MEETS THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND DOCTOR WHO COURTESY OF GEOFF SENIOR. BELOW RIGHT: THE DEATH OF DEATH'S HEAD

EVER HAD ONE OF THOSE DAYS WHERE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING GOES RIGHT, HUH?
FELLA... YOU ARE IN BIG TROUBLE!
OH, THAT'S ALL RIGHT WHERE IS THE OTHER FELLOW?
I'M SURE WE'LL SOON SORT THIS OUT
PLEASED TO MEET YOU DOCTOR YES?
DOUBT YOU CAN SAY THE SAME EH?
BEST OF LUCK DOCTOR

Marvel were not yet ready to give up on Deaths Head, though. In March 1990, the metal maniac had made his Marvel US debut in *Fantastic Four* #338, and after a couple more US appearances (in *She Hulk* #24 and *Marvel Comics Presents* #76) Deaths Head 'returned' as part of the newly launched Marvel UK line of American style titles, available on both sides of the Atlantic (and also serialized in Britain in 'Overkill' magazine).

Unfortunately, the comedic Deaths Head was not felt to be a good fit for the line as a whole, and so the first issue of 'Deaths Head II' (March 1992) sees Deaths Head decapitated and his memories (though not his quirky personality) assimilated by the cyborg Minion, a servant of terrorist group AIM created in the near future by one Dr Evelyn Necker. The revamp, courtesy of Dan Abnett and Liam Sharp, was a four part limited series, but it led to an ongoing title (several spin off titles for DH and his voluptuous new partner, Tuck–all of which, in keeping with the requirements of the time, were unremittingly grim, gritty, and above all totally humorless! The differences between the revived Death's Head and the original version were made even more obvious when in 1993, Marvel republished most of the original stories (with new linking material featuring Death's Head II reviewing the events at a mysterious electronic archive) in the twelve issue limited series 'The Incomplete Death's Head' (Jan–Dec '93). Predictably, as with many not dissimilar titles and indeed companies at the time, the Marvel UK line burned out pretty quickly. By August 1994 it was all over, and aside from a cameo in the limited series 'Avengers Forever', Deaths Head II has not been seen since. The name has been reused, in the 'Deaths Head 3.0' series in 'Amazing Fantasy' (2005), also by Simon Furman, but there seems no direct link to either previous version of the character.

No Marvel character ever really dies for good though, and hopefully sooner or later someone will see the untapped potential of the original (and best) Deaths Head and give him another shot at stardom. After all, no–one knows more about shots than the freelance peacekeeping agent. Yes? ●

TOP RIGHT: ART BY ART WETHERELL FROM DEATH'S HEAD #8; BELOW: A SELECTION OF DEATH'S HEAD COVER ART BY SIMON COLEBY (LEFT), WALT SIMONSON AND MARK FARMER (CENTRE) AND BRYAN HITCH AND MARK FARMER (RIGHT)

17 years in limbo, now he's back!
The Avon Avenger!
The Woodspring Warrior!
The North Somerset... not Superman!
Earth's most provincial hero...

CAPTAIN CLEVEDON

KEV F

It's not an unusual occurrence here at the offices of Crikey! to receive articles that have a familiar theme to them. This obviously presents a dilemma: which do we publish? We fully appreciate the effort and research needed to produce such work and we don't want to let anybody down by rejecting articles, but sometimes we must. However, not this time as we explore the impact of a certain ape like tendency of Marvel UK...

POTA-GATE

The Accidental Origin of Marvel UK's First Hero

BY JOHN ROCHE

Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention. In late 1974, early 1975, Marvel comics had a genuine hit with its weekly comic, *Planet of the Apes* (POTA). Launched on the back of a new TV Series that failed to find a big enough audience in the US, but was enormously popular (12 million viewers) in the UK, *POTA Weekly* went on to outlive the series by nearly three years, clocking up 123 issues before merging with *Mighty World of Marvel* (#231-246) in 1977 (see *Crikey!* #9).

POTA Weekly can claim several firsts. It was the first Marvel weekly to sport occasional oil painting covers, including a sumptuous Bob Larkin masterpiece on issue one. *POTA Weekly* was the first Marvel weekly to run regular text articles (featuring priceless pics and tidbits for the ravenous Ape-o-philes soon to be

deprived of their weekly television fix), as well as regular colour photo posters from the TV series. *POTA* was also the first comic I bought regularly, leading, via the *MWOM* merger, to a lifelong, zombie-like devotion to the House of Ideas Stan built.

Can *POTA* also claim another first? Can it claim to be the home of the very first character specifically and exclusively created by Marvel for a UK audience, over a year before Captain Britain burst, full colour, into our world? And, if so, how did such a thing ever come to be?

POTA Weekly was, in early 1975, Marvel's biggest selling weekly and the lead content comprised re-prints of the Ape strips that were running in Marvel's US black and white *Planet of the Apes* magazine which was also a hit, rapidly moving to a monthly schedule and by all accounts, garnishing enormous numbers of letters from readers. *POTA* US had a standard format of roughly 20 pages devoted to a serialised adaptation of one of the five Apes movies,with a roughly equal number of pages given to an original story. All tales in *POTA* US, adaptation and original, were penned by Doug Moench and art duties were handled by a mouth watering roster of artists including Alcala, Tuska, Sutton and Ploog. Mike Ploog's run on *Terror on the Planet of the Apes* featured various styles of wonderful art and it is his 'charcoal' phase, and its connection with POTA-Gate, that we will return to later.

The accepted mantra for decades in various journals and comic publications, has been that *POTA Weekly* was *so* popular it outstripped the material available from the US monthly and so, in a devilish bit of improvisation, Marvel UK 'adapted' a Killraven strip from *Amazing Adventures*, pasting Ape heads on the bad guys, darkening the hero's hair, re-branding him as 'Apeslayer'. It's certainly true that this re-working of Killraven happened between *POTA* Weeklies #23 and #30 inclusive, taking us from the end of March to mid May 1975. In a ridiculous way, the story actually works, too and, lo, Apeslayer, a character who straddled the licenses of HG Wells and Pierre Boulle with impunity, was born, never to be seen in the US and giving rise to the tale of insatiable Brits, racing ahead of their US cousins in thei demand for Ape tales. Marvel UK had triumphed in adversity and necessity had mothered a new character.

Except the legend doesn't actually stand up to close inspection. If Marvel UK were truly short of material at this time, why were they so profligate in using it? Normally Marvel would stretch a 20 page US story over three or four issues with supporting tales like *Ka-zar* and sci-fi stories filling out the rest of the comic. An original story in US Apes #5 by Doug Moench, 'Evolution's Nightmare', was showcased in issues 20-22 inclusive of *POTA Weekly*. Remarkably, just the week before that, in *POTA Weekly* #19, the entire 20 page fourth chapter of *Terror on the Planet of the Apes*, drawn by Mike Ploog, was run in one go, when it could easily have run

(LEFT): ART BY GEORGE TUSKA
(BELOW): ART BY

--WHEN YOU'RE DIGGING FOR ARTIFACTS... DON'T BURY YOUR REPUTATION!
GUARDS--!
THEY'VE STARTED TO FIGHT AGAIN-- THE STUPID BEASTS!
SPUNCH!
WHEN WILL THEY EVER LEARN--?!
--D THINK ONE TASTE OF THE WHIP WOULD BE ENOUGH!
BUT NO-- YOU CAN'T EVEN POUND SENSE INTO THESE BEASTS!
YEAH, BUT MAYBE THIS ONE'LL SIMMER DOWN AFTER HE'S--
SHWAKK!
YEEEEE!
WUDD!

TOO LATE KILLRAVEN REMEMBERS WHAT HE'S LEFT BEHIND HIM IN THE RUINED REMAINS OF THE ONCE-GREAT GRAND CENTRAL STATION!
TOO LATE HE REMEMBERS THE KEEPER'S BUNKER-- AND WHAT THAT SCIENTIST'S HEAD-QUARTERS HAD CONCEALED-- THE TWISTED ROOTS OF THINGS NO LONGER HUMAN, THINGS NOW BETTER NAMED--
APES!
S THIS WHAT YOU W TCHES WISH TO SERVE?
WHAT'S HAPPENED, LADIES-- NO STOMACH FOR FIGHTING?
RUN! THEN-- HIDE.
IT DOESN'T MATTER
--N TIME-- YOU'LL PAY FOR WHAT'S BEEN DONE TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF EARTH--
YOU DESERVE TO WALLOW WITH THE BEASTS!
--AS WILL YOUR SIMIAN MASTERS!

over three issues also. So where was the 'supply outstripping demand' problem at the beginning of March 1975 which led to *Apeslayer* at the end of March 1975?

It gets murkier. The first eleven issues of *POTA Weekly* ran the adaptation of the original movie, drawn by George Tuska, which had run in US Apes #1-6 inclusive. *POTA Weekly* then ran the *Terror* and *Evolution's Nightmare* strips up to the *Apeslayer* issues. However, US Apes #6 (cover dated March 1975, effectively Jan 1975), already reprinted in part in *POTA Weekly* 10 and 11, also featured Mike Ploog's fifth chapter of *Terror*, introducing his astonishing and still lauded charcoal style. Why, if Marvel UK had already reprinted one half of a magazine over two months earlier, could it not now simply run the other half, especially if demand was so intense. More importantly,

MEANWHILE IN THE VILLAGE PRISON THE PREFECT BEGAN QUESTIONING HIS NEW PRISONERS
SO WHERE HAVE YOU RUN AWAY FROM?
WE HAVEN'T RUN FROM ANYWHERE WE'RE FREE MEN
FREE MEN? WHO EVER HEARD OF NEXT YOU'LL TELL ME HUMANS ARE AS GOOD AS APES!
THAT'S RIGHT GORILLA!
LOOK, PREFECT WE'VE COMMITTED NO CRIMES! LET US GO!
YEAH, BESIDES, YOUR HOSPITALITY STINKS!

why did that Ploog chapter not actually even see print in *POTA Weekly* for a year, notwithstanding the fact that the *Terror* strip became a mainstay of the US magazine and, later, the UK Weekly, the latter managing to run adaptations of three entire movies, three original tales *and* Apeslayer before bringing *Terror* back for UK fans after a year's hiatus.

Whatever the reason, it was not shortage of material. There are some giveaway clues that an Apes geek can point to to show that art that post dated the missing Ploog charcoal tale was used in *Apelayer*, begging the question–what happened to the Ploog tale? As well as a slightly incongruous looking Dr Zaius figure pasted into page 4 of *POTA Weekly* #24, which was a flipped re-hash of Tuska's Dr Zaius in US Apes #6 (the issue containing the Ploog charcoal strip and dated

"TAKE YOUR STINKING PAWS OFF ME, YOU DAMNED DIRTY APE!"*

SBY CONTACT _CON-3D9DEF0D1 \C \S \L STEPHEN HOOKER

I begged my mum to take me to see *Planet of the Apes* (which was, by then, double billed with *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*) at my local Odeon in the early 1970s. She refused.

Any amount of *Carry On* films were just fine in her books. Even if I still have nightmares reliving the moment Barbara Windsor's bikini top pinged off in *Carry on Camping* and revealed all. And how did a small garrison of troops defeat a screaming mass of bloodthirsty native fighters (okay, admittedly led by a nasal, oscillating Kenneth Williams) by simply lifting up their kilts in *Carry on up the Khyber*? My young mind could not comprehend the world of grown-up humour.

Anyway, back to my campaign.

Surely, I surmised at the time, Charlton Heston would be my ticket to Ape City. He was old, like my mum. Surely they were a match made in Heaven? Alas, a mistaken assumption. My mum was more Ralph Bates and Oliver Reed; oiled up, preferably naked, wrestling, by a big open fire.

Evidently, my finger was not on my mum's pulse.

Chuck and his one-man war on all things Simian would remain *verboten* to me.

1976 would be a breakthrough year though. Before going to school, I would peruse the comic table of a newspaper vendor for my usual comic reading delights of war, more war and *Captain Hurricane*. It was here that I found a title that would give me all the apes and simian society I needed in one hit, namely the weekly published *Planet of the Apes*. This would also be my first contact with Marvel UK.

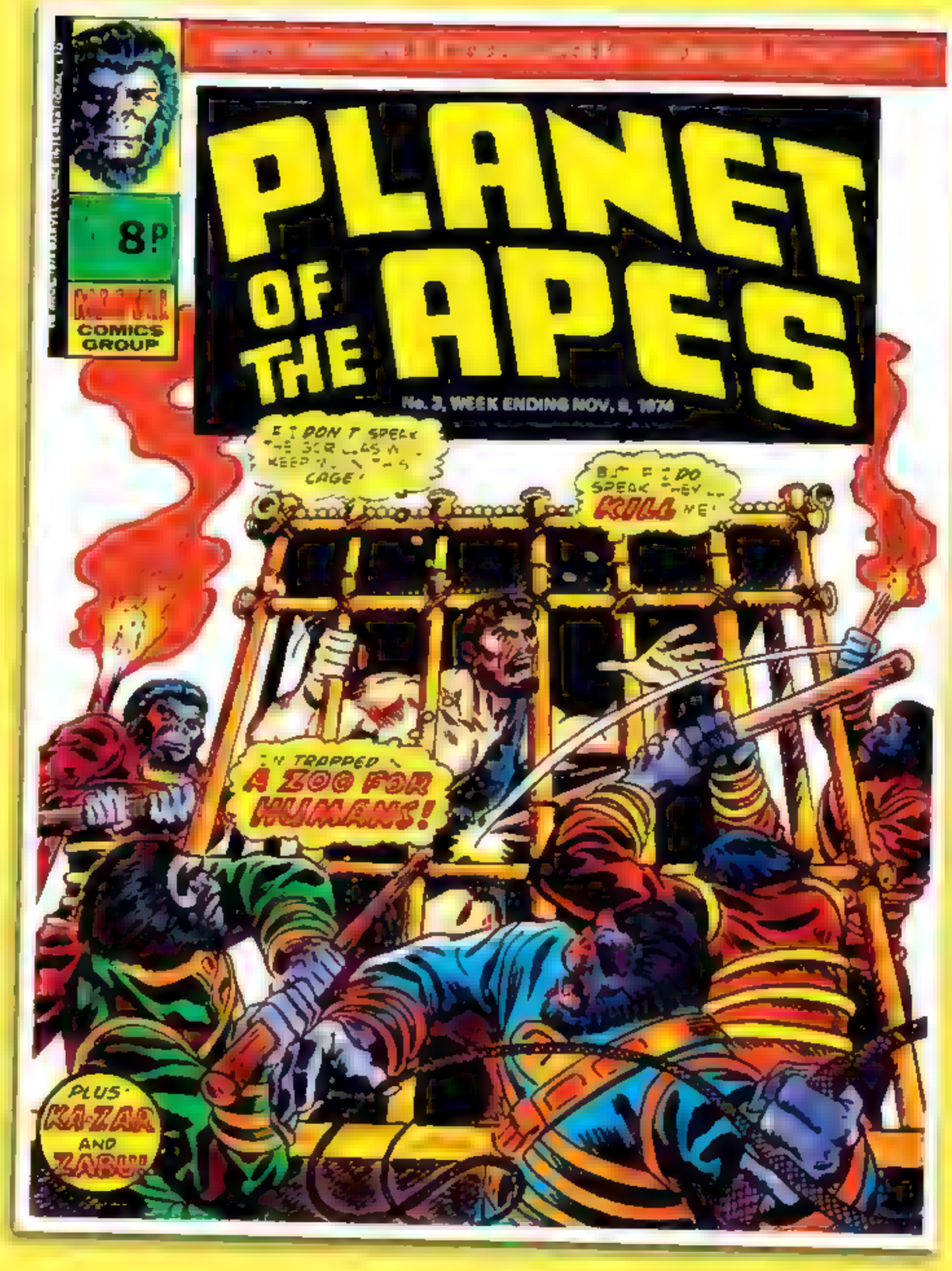
I joined the series late; the adaptation of *Conquest for the Planet of the Apes* was in full er... swing. But *POTA* was one of those back issue wonders that can be found, from time to time, piled high in some ignored corner of a newsagents, whose owner could not be bothered to throw out old comics. I guess he was waiting for me. I obtained dozens of copies of *POTA*.

Conquest was illustrated by the phenomenally underrated Alfredo Alcala and written by Doug Moench, a writer who would bring a wider canvas to Ape society than I feel anyone was really prepared for, ignoring the usual and lazy clichés that some comic book writers like to fall into, right from *Conquests* opening page's silence, only broken by the 'toc, toc, toc' of the security guard's footsteps, closely followed by the gun-fire and the death of an ape breaking curfew.

Main feature aside, *POTA* did have a few oddities in the shape of its back up strips. Warlock by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane, great character but a little misplaced in *POTA*. Okay, there was a bear riding a rat-faced dragon and a man with a cobra's head; it was Sci-Fi. So maybe that's just me. But *Warlock* was

* CHARLTON HESTON, THE PLANET OF THE APES, (20TH CENTURY FOX ,1968)

March 1975, effectively January 1975, therefore two months *before* 'Apeslayer' was published) there's also, on page 2 of *POTA Weekly* #26, episode 4 of *Apeslayer*, a re-used drawing of Cornelius by Alfredo Alcala, that originally appeared in #7 of the US Apes mag (dated April 1975, effectively February 1975). So, not only did Marvel UK publish and re-use art from US Apes #6, which contained the missing Ploog strip, it also clearly had access to and re-used art from US Apes #7, which *post-dated* the missing Ploog strip. The painted cover of *POTA Weekly* #27 is the cover to US Apes #9, cover dated June 1975, meaning it was out in April 1975 and clearly available to Marvel UK then (who duly ran the new strip it contained, *Kingdom on an Island of the Apes*, immediately after Apeslayer's run). So, not only did Apeslayer 'replace' the missing Ploog charcoal strip from US Apes #6, he also replaced the similar style chapter from US Apes #8–even though Marvel UK was able to use the later cover of US Apes #9 as a cover on *POTA Weekly* #27 in the middle of Apeslayer's run! What on earth was going on in the offices of Marvel UK to leave them jumping through such hoops?


8p
COMICS GROUP
PLANET OF THE APES
No. 2, WEEK ENDING NOV. 9, 1974
I DON'T SPEAK THE SIGN LANGUAGE KEEP ME IN THIS CAGE!
BUT I DO SPEAK THEY KILL ME!
TRAPPED A ZOO FOR HUMANS!
PLUS KA-ZAR AND ZABU!

Why, if demand was so rabid, would Marvel simply not use the very handy 20 or so pages of the Ploog srtip from US Apes #6? I can suggest two possibilities–first, the pages of that story somehow got lost in the (pre-internet) post between here and the US. Such things could happen–a Gil Kane 'Amazing Spider-Man' was lost and had to be inked from photostats.

The second possibility is that Mike Ploog's charcoal style caused too many problems still a superhero. *Black Panther* was in the same mould too, no problem with the strip itself, and if you like a little art with your text, courtesy of Don McGregor, really ideal. But not in *POTA*. Where were the science fiction back ups to a science fiction concept?

Well, from Time To Time, Marvel UK would get the hang of the SF aspect and reprint the likes of Roy Thomas and Alex Nino's brilliant *Man-Gods From Beyond The Stars* and an assortment of other strips from Marvel USA's short-lived black and white magazine Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction (one of only two series that I have had bound into hardback volumes).POTA was published from 26th October 1974 to 23 February 1977, before being merged (no doubt with a Stan Lee*esque* 'because you demanded it' giant-sized blurb on the cover. Which, I'll have you know, I did not!) into *Mighty World of Marvel* (superheroes, ugh!). There were one hundred and twenty-three issues of *POTA*, picking up the impressive *Dracula Lives* along the way with issue eighty-eight.

I know, from hanging around with fellow comic collectors in the 70s and 80s, Marvel UK comics like *POTA* were often dismissed as mere reprints and, in monetary terms, valueless. But I'm older and wiser and have come to appreciate more the positive role *POTA* had on my burgeoning tastes in comics. It was these tastes, whilst sidelined by one too many US superheroes, which have stayed with me to this day.

Thank you Marvel UK; thank you *Planet Of The Apes*!

with reproduction. Ploog's magnificent line-work was lost even in the US magazine's reproduction and that problem would only have been worsened by the further reproduction process for the UK publication. Is it possible that the reproduction was so bad it couldn't be used and it was only a year later that adequate copies became available (when *POTA Weekly* ran back to back, 40 pages worth, of *Terror* charcoal strips over several weeks from #6 and #8 of the US Apes mag)? Faced with smudgy copies and having, inexplicably, blown a potential three week's worth of material in *POTA Weekly* #19, did the UK office bite the bullet and decide to morph *Killraven* into *Apeslayer*, with the legend 'supply outstripping demand' simply becoming the accepted version of events?

The answer is lost in the mists of time and the legend is a more satifactory story anyway. As origin tales go, however, *Apeslayer*'s may possibly be the most British you could get–technical difficulties and postal delays inspired heroic improvisation in the face of overwhelming odds.

Pass me me tin hat, there's a Martian Ape tripod coming down the street... ●

(RIGHT): ORIGINAL COVER ART FROM POTA UK 24 (BELOW LEFT): MIKE PLOOG'S ORIGINAL CHARCOAL ARTWORK & (BELOW RIGHT): PLOOG'S ART AS IT APPEARED

COLLECTOR-

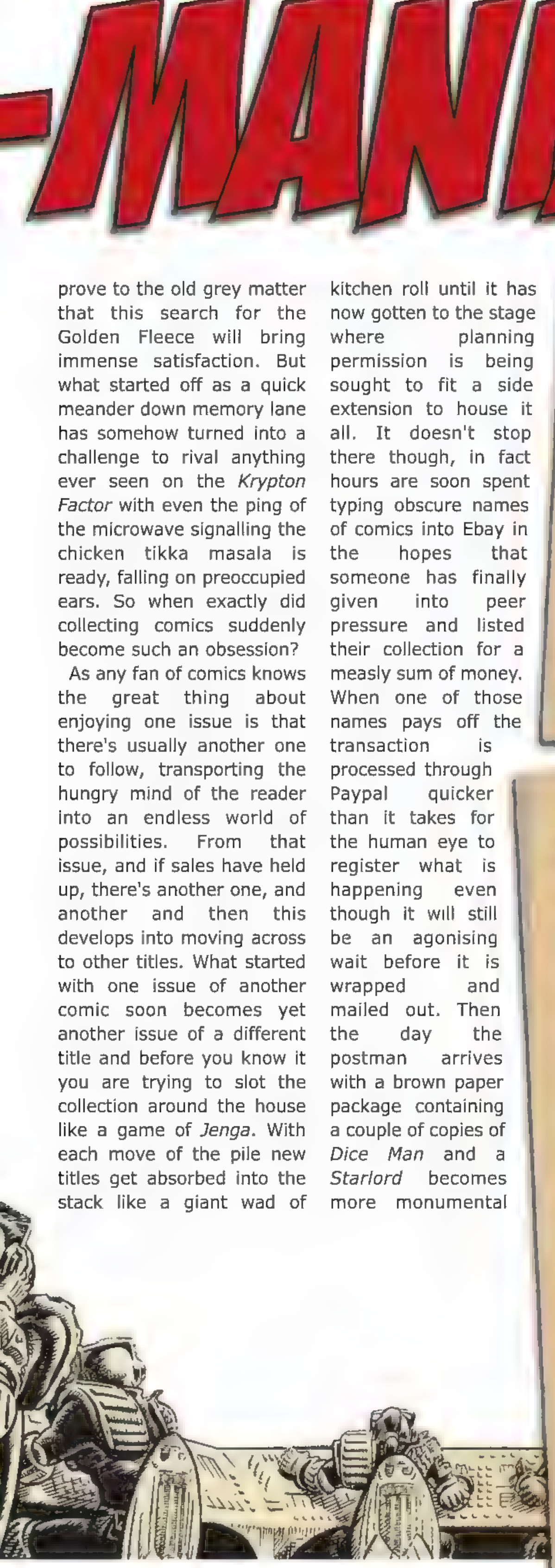
BY ALEX WIGGAN

You know you've put it somewhere, but between the pile of *Topper*'s and the half dozen *Bunty*'s you are keeping for a 'friend' you can't quite put your finger on that illusive copy of *TV21* that features *The Adventures of The Ringo Kid*. The last time you saw it was when you were cataloguing all the *Beezer*'s before they were boxed up for their new home under the bed, but try as you might, the whereabouts of this one issue is causing a headache the size of King Kong. Could it be that you never actually owned it in the first place? Was the memory of swapping a half completed football sticker album with Jimmy 'Tuesday Pants' during play-time, just a fabrication? No, it is definitely in the house somewhere it's just a matter of getting out the loft ladders and sifting through a few more boxes marked 'keep', in order to find it. In fact there is even more determination pumping through the veins than ever because it is the only way to

-MANIA

prove to the old grey matter that this search for the Golden Fleece will bring immense satisfaction. But what started off as a quick meander down memory lane has somehow turned into a challenge to rival anything ever seen on the *Krypton Factor* with even the ping of the microwave signalling the chicken tikka masala is ready, falling on preoccupied ears. So when exactly did collecting comics suddenly become such an obsession?

As any fan of comics knows the great thing about enjoying one issue is that there's usually another one to follow, transporting the hungry mind of the reader into an endless world of possibilities. From that issue, and if sales have held up, there's another one, and another and then this develops into moving across to other titles. What started with one issue of another comic soon becomes yet another issue of a different title and before you know it you are trying to slot the collection around the house like a game of *Jenga*. With each move of the pile new titles get absorbed into the stack like a giant wad of kitchen roll until it has now gotten to the stage where planning permission is being sought to fit a side extension to house it all. It doesn't stop there though, in fact hours are soon spent typing obscure names of comics into Ebay in the hopes that someone has finally given into peer pressure and listed their collection for a measly sum of money. When one of those names pays off the transaction is processed through Paypal quicker than it takes for the human eye to register what is happening even though it will still be an agonising wait before it is wrapped and mailed out. Then the day the postman arrives with a brown paper package containing a couple of copies of *Dice Man* and a *Starlord* becomes more monumental



I'M GETTING OLD...I COULD USE A LITTLE SUMMER NOW AND THEN...
WHY, BOB, I'M SURPRISED AT YOU!
WHO--?
KURT HAMMER: LET GO OF THAT GIRL, KURT!
MOVE IT, BOB! I GOT BUSINESS--
KRAK!
GOOD SHOOTIN', KURT!
THAT'S THE WAY--
HE'S GONE CRAZ.. UNNNHH!
GET DOWN!
DON'T SHOOT— YOU'LL HIT THE GIRL!
HEY! HE SHOT BOB--!
WHAT THE--
MOTHER OF...
VAROOOMM!!
You are the DICE MAN
MAYBE KURT HAD GROWN TIRED OF RUNNING... MAYBE HE WAS GROWING OLD...OR MAYBE THOSE CREATURES FROM ANOTHER WORLD FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH HIM... EITHER WAY, WHEN HE DIED IN THAT ALLEY WITH A TRIPLE-BLADED DAG IN HIS BACK, NO-ONE SAW WHAT HAPPENED, NO-ONE CAME TO HIS AID...BECAUSE...
ART GRAHAM MARLEY
STORY/GAME PAT MILLS
LETTERING MARK KING
IN THE BRONX, NO-ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM!

than learning how to drive, getting married, or managing to open a tin of corned beef unaided without serrated fingers. With each new addition an automatic barrier comes down in the mind declaring that once something becomes part of the stack it can never leave, even if it's that copy of *Look-in* with the pull out poster of Tommy Boyd and Michaela Strachan which snuck in whilst your back was turned. What has been pulled together from many different sources is now your pride, your joy, and that thing which reminds you of the more carefree days before you had to worry about paying the mortgage or spending weekends attending someone's wedding. It asks very little of you, just that it can be kept safe, out of direct sunlight and maybe could have a moment of your time between the ad breaks whilst *X-factor* is on. It never needs to be fed, requires no exercise, doesn't run up huge vet bills and over time could be worth a pretty penny. Although the safety and security of it always plays on your mind, especially during the cold months when the boiler's on the blink and the curtains have started to ice over, you know it will always be there to dip in and out of and add to. The sheer joy of coming across a new issue in the most random of places to add to the collection makes up for any sleepless nights and even years after publication the likes of *Star Wars Weekly* can still entertain.

So, you spend a lot of time working at preserving the collection, and maybe not everyone understands what pushes your buttons every time you hear the name *Korky the Kat*, but that doesn't mean there is anything wrong with that. What it does mean is that you have a passion, a drive, something which makes you the person you are today and chances are it also gives you a leg up in a pub quiz should the subject of comics ever be used as the end of game bonus question. Yes that free lunch at the local Dog & Duck and a beer voucher worth up to the value of two quid can be yours simply because of the path life has laid out for you that involves acquiring comics. There are far worse ways to spend your free time and if staying awake during school taught anything, it was that reading is deemed as something pretty useful to society. Turns out technology has developed to the point where connecting letters together to form sentences is just as important now as it has ever been and when combined with the knowledge that making comics actually requires a bit of skill it's surprising that it has taken so long for people to notice. Thankfully collecting comics is not a solo pursuit and with websites dedicated to helping you collect, manage or even sell your treasure trove there are quite literally a whole host of people who appreciate and value what has become a carefully developed hobby. Less technical than fly fishing, safer than rugby league and arguably as entertaining as an evening spent salsa dancing, it's a hobby which at times can border on obsession but that's what makes it so much fun! Finding that rare issue, that title once thought lost to time, that missing *Dandy* which fits so snugly in with the rest to produce exquisite numerical heaven is amazing. It's an achievement which should be marvelled at as it shows commitment, and in a world where pledges, promises and perseverance are not a guarantee, it truly is something worth being a little bit protective over. Yes you poly bag each issue, yes you take care when turning each page, yes you cordon off the living room when you alphabetise titles but it's nothing less than what anyone who shows pride in their endeavours would do. So no matter how long it takes to trace the one comic which has caused a race against time to prove its existence in an endless sea of paper, staples and free gifts, it's just one more excuse to spend time with the one you love. ●

A D V E R T I S E M E N T

An alien space craft is sent on a peaceful mission
of discovery to a remote planet.

Upon reaching this brave new world, the crew discover only war,
death and uncertainty.

And themselves.

ARRIVAL

A novella from the pen of Glenn B Fleming.

Available on Kindle in August.

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VALIANT ANNUAL 1969:

A DASHED BRITISH TRADITION, DON'T YOU KNOW? WHAT, WHAT?!

NEXT MOMENT...
THE CONTROL PANEL'S BLOWN UP! I'D BETTER TELL THE BOSS WE'RE DEALING WITH A HUMAN POWERHOUSE!
NOW THE FANTASTIC STEEL CLAW CAME INTO PLAY...
MOMENTS LATER...
THAT BLOW BACK HAS TEMPORARILY DRAINED MY ELECTRO-ENERGY. I'M TOO WEAK TO BREAK THESE STRAPS. BUT THE BLADE BURIED INTO MY STEEL FINGER WILL GET ME FREE!
COME
THE METAL HAND WAS AN ARMOURY OF HIDDEN TOOLS...
FIRE CONTROL ROOM
WHAT'S A LOCKED DOOR TO A MAN WITH A PICK-LOCK IN HIS THUMB?
NOW TO FIND OUT WHO THE HOSTILE FORCES ARE, AND WHAT NASTY LITTLE PLANS THEY ARE HATCHING!
BLUNDERING FOOLS! DID YOU LET THE SWAT SQUAD A BEAT ESCAPE, DID YOU?

BY STEPHEN HOOKER

There are some uniquely British traditions that have stood the test of time, draped with the heavy austerity of pomp and circumstance, hailing from the very dawn of time. Important traditions, which are, and make no mistake about it, the very bedrock of the British way of life.

I am addressing particularly the tradition of sandals, when worn by middle aged men, must be resplendent with socks pulled up as far as they can go, in temperatures only mad dogs truly know (thank you Mr Bridger).

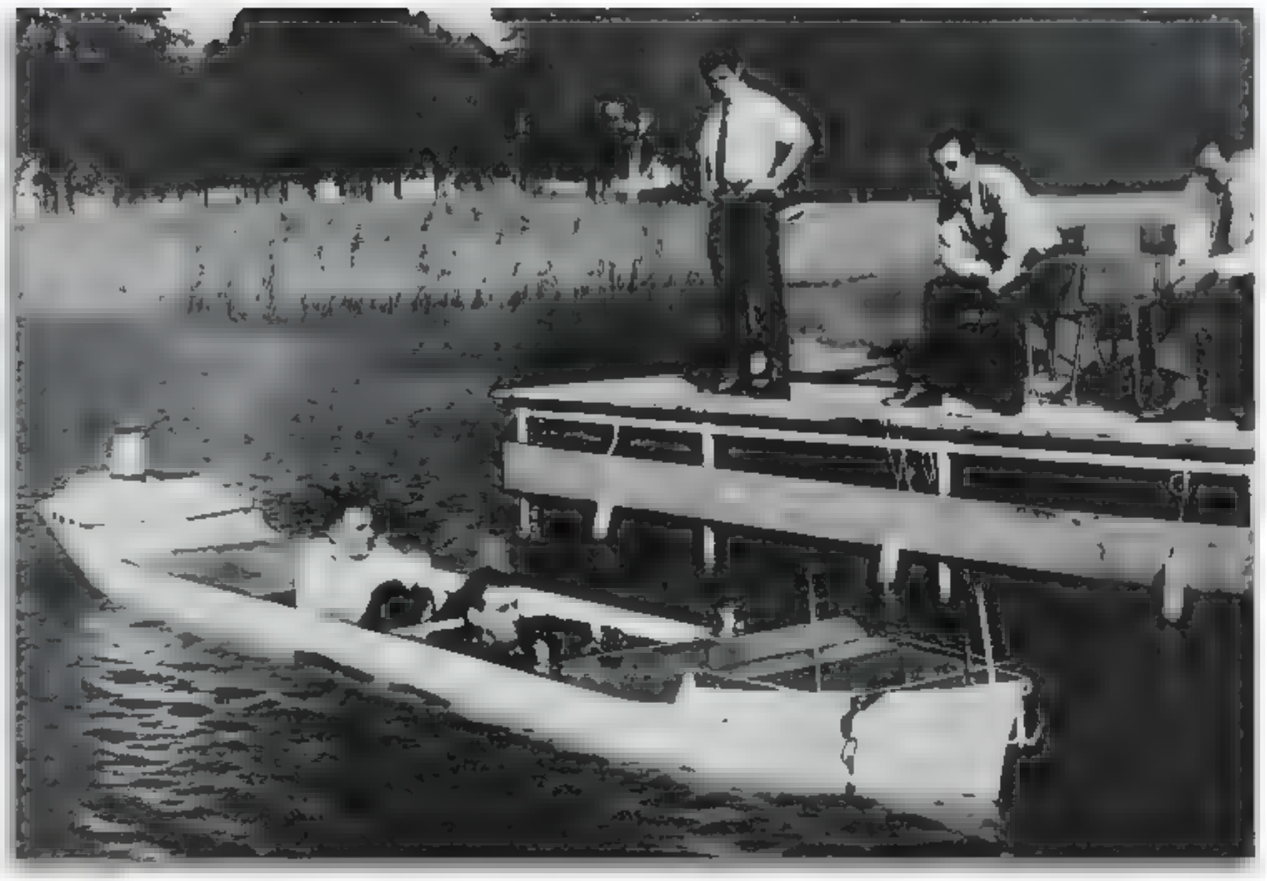
When changing on the beach, the tradition of struggling to put a swimming costume on underneath a towel, (the size of a postage stamp, for that amateur flasher feeling) with one hand, whilst holding said towel up with the other hand, to cover our modesty, is a live and flourishing in beach side resorts all over the UK.

Need I mention: The British tradition of queuing!

Furthermore, the traditionally British way of showing our collective annoyance, at say profligate banks and inept Governments, is alive and well. This particular tradition empowers hoards of English men and women, shaking their united fists, rising up as one and venting their displeasure in the letter columns of The

(LEFT): 'THE STEEL CLAW' AS ILLUSTRATED BY JESUS BLASCO
(BELOW) 'THE HOUSE OF DOLMANN' ART BY XXXX

AFTER A HECTIC CHASE...
I TELL YOU THAT SCREWY HELICOPTER THING HAS BEEN TRAILING US FOR THE LAST TEN MILES!
OKAY, FELLERS, WE'LL SPLIT UP! THOSE SNOOPERS WILL NEVER TRACK US DOWN SINGLY IN THE FAIRGROUND!
C. CRUZ.



AHH – MEN AND THEIR TOYS...

Times, The Telegraph, The Guardian and The Independent (Sun readers, I'm informed, have other distractions). And those letter writers are comforted by the fact that, grammatically, their spleens have been vented.

The French, on the other hand, have a revolution and a Republic.

But, you know - habitually - I digress.

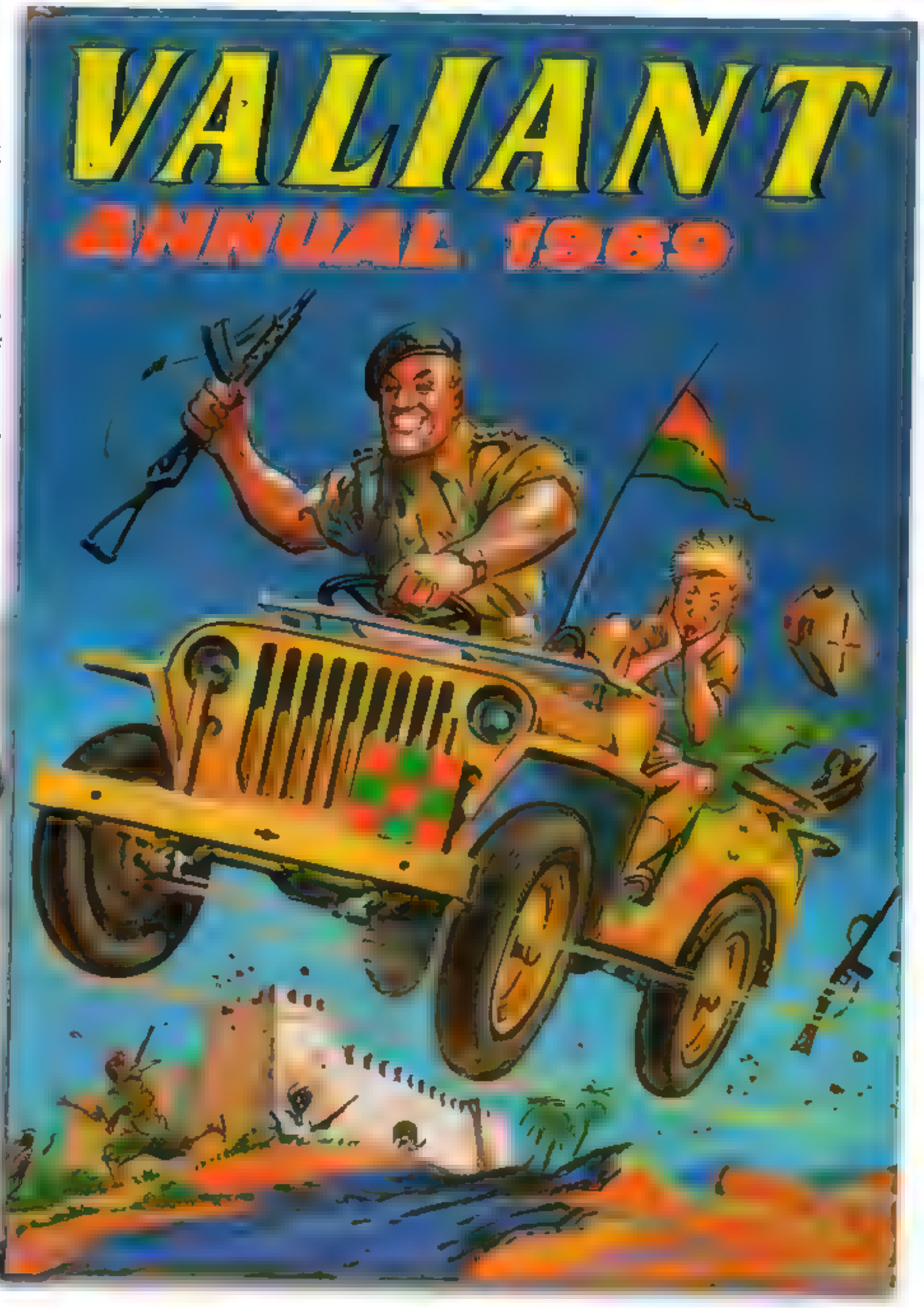
When I was seven years old, back in 1969, there was only one tradition that mattered, a family one, established by my Uncle Tony and no one else (which, of course was not the case and, in reality, he was - God bless him - just following a publishing trend. But when you are young your heroes invent things first.) So, from my uncle, no Christmas was complete without an annual, a posh hardback edition of a favourite comic. My Uncle had spotted my recent conversion to The Valiant and no wrapping paper could disguise his intent.

10'6d (52 1/2p), was the entrance fee to the 1969 Valiant Annual and it was worth every tuppeny ha'penny of my Uncle Tony's hard earned, lathe operated, cash. Captain Hurricane and Maggot Malone graced the front and back covers, taking the British WW2 effort to the Axis powers, with their accustomed aplomb, brews a plenty and fists a flying, in other words.

Aside from the stories there were articles on future gazing and tub-thumping British excellence in sports. These articles might seem naive to our jaded 21st century sensibilities now and the stiff upper-lip and plucky derring-do of feels even more out of kilter forty years on. However, for some historical prospective, the Ministry For The Colonies (yes, it really did exist) had only shut up shop in 1966. The Ministry was chocked full of pen-pushers and their mandarins (best served with Tip Top, I believe), whose sole purpose had been to oversee the British Empire. Naturally, by 1966, there was not much left to oversee, hence the termination of the Ministry.However, that feeling of Empireness, for wont of a better word, no doubt remained in the nation's subconscious, conversations, films, television programmes, newspapers and the very air that we Brits breathed.

The 1969 Valiant Annual was not >

VALIANT ANNUAL 1969 COVER ILLUSTRATION BY GEOFF CAMPION



(BELOW LEFT): HENRY COOPER TRIES TO BREAK HIS NECK
(BELOW CENTRE):JACK AND BOBBY CHARLTON IN THEIR PLAYING DAYS...

THE HOUSE OF DOLMANN
A MASTER-PUPPETEER KNOWN AS DOLMANN HAD SECRETLY CREATED A FANTASTIC ARMY OF MECHANICAL WARRIORS TO FIGHT CRIME
ONE OF HIS MOST RESOUNDING TRIUMPHS INVOLVED A POP-GROUP WHO CALLED THEMSELVES THE SPECTRUMS.
WITH APPLAUSE RINGING IN THEIR EARS THE POP-SINGERS HURRIED OFF STAGE AND INTO THEIR DRESSING ROOM.
WE'RE GOING TO REHEARSE OUR NEW NUMBER BEFORE WE GO ON STAGE AGAIN IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE SHOW
PUT OUR LATEST DISC ON THE RECORD-PLAYER SEAT WHEN THEY HEAR IT EVERY ONE BACKSTAGE WILL THINK WE'RE IN HERE!
A MOMENT LATER IN MY
NEH HEH WE OUGHT TO BE TOP OF THE CH THIS JEWEL ER'S SHOU BE OUR TENTH JOB A FORTNIGHT
Jewellery Shop
BLEEP-BLEEP!
SHOVE THAT LOOT INTO THE GUITAR CASES QUICK!
MEANWHILE IN THE NEARBY BACK STREET SHOP OF CRIME FIGHTER DOLMANN
CRIPPLED AND UNCONTROLLABLE THE PLANE HURTLED ACROSS THE SKY
I'VE GOT ABOUT HALF A SECOND TO GET OUT!
THE PILOT'S ACE HAD CLOSED THE THROTTLE AS HE PUSHED BACK THE COCKPIT COVER BUT NOW HE REALISED HE COULD NOT STAY WITH THE FLYING WRECK AND CHANCE HIS
I'M TOO LOW TO JUST SAY PARACHUTE LOOKS LIKE MY FLYING DAYS ARE OVER
WITH A BLAZING CRASH THE PLANE HIT THE TREES BELOW
THE LUCK THAT HAD SAVED BRITAIN'S GREATEST ACE IN MANY HAIR-RAISING ENCOUNTERS DID NOT DESERT HIM
RELAXING HIS MUSCLES, BATTLE HURTLED THROUGH THE UPPER BRANCHES
NEARBY THE CRASH SCENE WAS A RAGING INFERNO OF BLAZING WRECKAGE FUEL AND EXPLODING AMMUNITION
HOME GOES—FOR HAPPY LANDINGS!
it's TOUGH at
HEART
THE SLITHERING MENACE
THE AUSTRALIAN BLACKFELLER STOOD MOTIONLESS AS A PINNACLE OF RIGID MUSCLE HIS YELLOW EYES NEVER FLICKERING FROM THE WHITE MEN WHO WORKED THEIR WAY SLOWLY ALONG THE BANK OF THE STREAM
ENGLISHMAN HARRY SMITH AND AUSTRALIAN TIM RANDALL
THEY WERE PROSPECTORS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND CARRIED A GEIGER-MULLER COUNTER FOR DETECTING RADIO-ACTIVE URANIUM ORE.
FIGURE WE'VE HIT IT THIS TIME HARRY. THIS STREAM IS WASHING OVER SOME RICH DEPOSITS SOMEWHERE!
SO ALL WE'VE GOT TO DO IS FOLLOW THIS STREAM. LET'S HOPE OUR LUCK HOLDS OUT!
THEY TRACKED THE STREAM UP A BARRIER OF RED ROCK TO ITS SOURCE IT WAS HERE THAT THEY MET THE ABORIGINALS
THERE'S THE SOURCE THAT QUEER TREE.
YOU WELCOME BUT YOU BEWARE DEMON TREE!
THEN WE'VE RUN OUT OF LUCK THE ORE CAN BE ANYWHERE INSIDE THAT HILL!
THE ABORIGINAL MISTAKENLY THOUGHT THE WHITE MEN WERE INTERESTED IN THE STRANGE TREE AND INVITED THEM TO WATCH THE CEREMONY THAT WAS ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE
THEN MAKE GIFTS OF FOOD. WITCH DOCTOR SAYS WE GIVE FOOD OR TREE GET ANGRY AND WALK IN MORNING YOU SEE ALL FOOD GONE!
OUT OF IDLE CURIOSITY TIM AND HARRY TOOK TURNS TO WATCH THE ISLAND DURING THE NIGHT NO ONE CENTURIES NEAR — BUT BY DAWN
HEY, TIM! THE FOOD'S GONE
DON'T BE SILLY — UNLESS THAT WITCH DOCTOR'S A DARN CLEVER SNEAK THIEF!
AND AS THEY BRUSH CAMP
HEY HARRY HOW COME YOU RIP YOUR PANTS IN THE NIGHT?
IT WAS THAT TREE. I SLIPPED OVER TO THAT ISLAND AND TOOK A SNIPPING. IT'S IN THIS TIN. MY NEPHEW BACK IN ENGLAND GETS ON TO ME IN EVERY LETTER FOR SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR HIS NATURE CLASS!
WAIT. YOUR OLD WITCH DOCTOR SNEAKS UP AFTER DARK AND PINCHES THE GRUB HIMSELF!
WELL, SMITH. YOU REALISE THAT YOU ARE THE ONLY BOY IN THIS CLASS WHO HAS FAILED TO BRING ANY ITEM OF INTEREST FOR OUR NATURE STUDY LESSONS THIS TERM?
AND A FORTNIGHT LATER... IN AN ENGLISH SCHOOL...
HEDGIE, SIR! NO SIR! I MEAN, I GOT THIS IN THE POST FROM MY UNCLE HARRY THIS MORNING...
LOOK, SIR. A PIECE OF AN AUSTRALIAN DEMON TREE THE NATIVES SAY IT EATS THINGS AND WALKS
HA-HA-HA GET HE FOUND THAT OLD STICK ON HIS WAY TO SCHOOL!
A TREE THAT WALKS. HES PULLING OLD FANWES LEG
SMITH. THAT IS NOT FUNNY! THROW THAT DIRTY TWIG OUT OF THE WINDOW AT ONCE AND YOU WILL REMAIN IN CLASS DURING THE MID-MORNING BREAK!

THERE is no easy way to the top in sport.

Fame doesn't just happen by chance—nor by luck. Every sportsman who has achieved international honours, won a world championship, set up national or world records, would agree that the road to fame is tough and gruelling.

When you see or hear of some sensational performance that gives you a big thrill and causes you to say "I wish I could do something like that," do you ever pause to think of all the months, maybe years, of training and preparation that have led up to that wonderful moment of glory!

As a well-known athlete once said There is only one way to achieve victory in any sport—work, hard work and even harder work, until it hurts!"

How true this was of Don Thompson, above, Britain's gold medal winner in the 50 kilometre walk at the 1960 Olympics in Rome.

If ever a man deserved to achieve fame and glory

immune to this.

Titled: 'It's Tough at the Top', this feature exulted the virtues of British sportsmen (sportswomen were no doubt taking it easy, in this extraordinary piece of sexism), such as Henry Cooper, pictured training with 14lb weights dangling from his manly head. 'They Made Soccer History' featured, amongst others, Jackie and Bobby Charlton as the first brothers, in that century, to play for England in 1965.

Future gazing came in the form of 'Aircraft Of The Future', which proclaimed that by the year 2000 all fixed-winged would be capable of vertical take off and landing. Also, giant, tourist packed, airliners would cruise though the stratosphere at 5000 mph. Clearly the author of the piece had not envisaged the formation of EasyJet and Ryanair!

The oddest by far, 'A Boating Lake for Men', detailed two-man scale models of oil tankers bobbing around a man made lake, allowing trainee oil tanker captains named er Bob to learn how to handle the scaled down vessels on a quiet Sunday afternoon, in an a scaled down Suez Canal. I have no idea how many divorces this training ground resulted in. But, my best guess would be, numerous.

Stand out stories and art belong to Captain Hurricane, incandescent with rage, even in war torn monochrome. The House Of Dolmann, in full colour and hailed from 1964 with art by C Cruz. The story parodies a Beatles like group, The Spectrums . This particular mop-top four use their concerts as cover to rob Jewellery shops, conveniently located next door to their venues. Giving the phrase, 'Gear, man.' a whole new meaning.

The Steel Claw dons his superhero costume to break up a spy ring in the heart of Britain's secret, hush-hush, Government establishment. Thankfully eschewing the cape of his sometime less than two-dimensional brethren on the other side of the Atlantic; the Steel Claw did his bit for democracy and the British way of life was saved from those dastardly foreigners.

Next up, Kelly's Eye. The jewel of invincibility hanging round Kelly's neck put him a similar world to Captain Scarlet but without the Cloud Base or the Angels (can you have a crush on a puppet? I ask not for me,

of course.....but for a friend, who wishes to remain nameless) or the strings. Kelly battles machine gun spraying robots and is forced to take a flight to steer UK's hush hush weapon of mass destruction to a safe altitude before it detonates.

Not quite fitting in with the overall tone of the 1969 annual was The Slithering Menace, an old Aboriginal demon tree threatens to eat everything in its path. A sort of Antipodean's Day of the Triffids, mates. However, large lumps of uranium dropped on it save the day. And everyone veritably glows with delight.

Battler Britton concludes the annual. The somewhat emotionless fighting ace, attempts to get to grips with a regiment of Nazis robots that are, seemingly, invincible to everything that is thrown at them . But Britton, ever resourceful, and with a seemingly endless supply of replacement aircraft, storms the radio control centre for the robots and cuts the transmission off at the source. Huzzars all round!

I supposed the Christmas annual treat would go on forever and, for a while, it seemed like it did. But by 1980 I was buying my own (Judge Dredd if you must know. But not for me, oh, no, for that friend again, you know, the one with the puppet fixation) and somehow that was not the same. The annuals seemed thinner too, not unlike the chocolate covering a Mars Bar these days.

But, for the short time my Uncle and the publication of UK annuals made the festive season, for this particular boy, a very merry reading time indeed.

And do I miss those days? It's the bear in the woods and the pope's hat answer then... ●

(ABOVE): VALIANT ANNUAL 1969 BACK COVER ILLUSTRATION BY GEOFF CAMPION

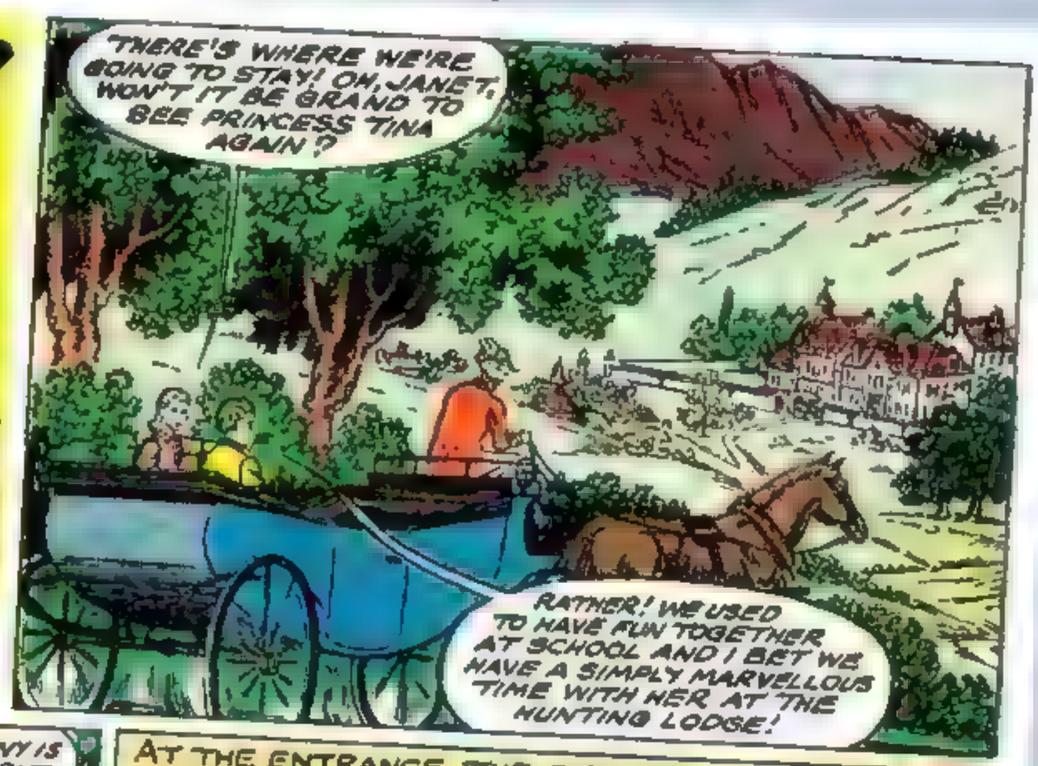
The Girls' Crystal was a wunderkind. A forerunner to the Judys, Buntys, Mistys, and other more well-known girls' comics, it flourished in the years 1935 to 1953, when every week, schoolgirls across Britain awaited it with feverish anticipation.
My mum told me about her days of rushing home from school to read the Girls' Crystal. The excitement! The thrills! And so I decided to check the comic out for myself. If you can rewind your brain to the mindset of an 11-year-old (something I have no problem doing), then these comics are indeed exciting!
Thrilling! Gripping! And surprisingly . educational.
Jody Kihara

Here are 30 things I learned from reading the Girls' Crystal:

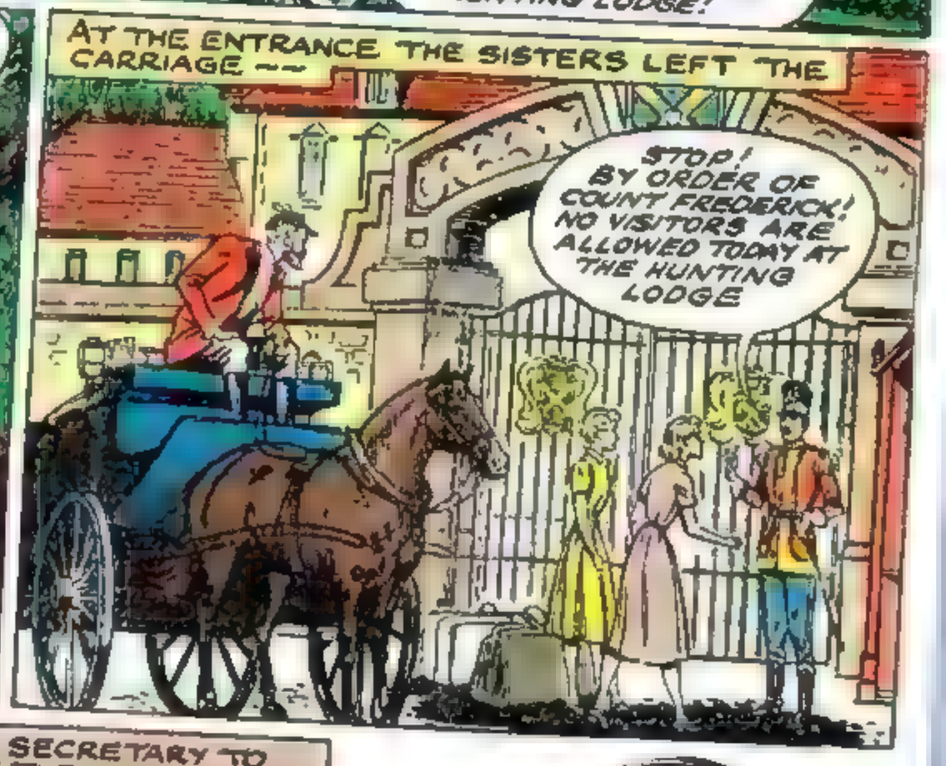
- Adventures happen when you go abroad on holiday.
- Or at boarding school. But more likely on holidays.
- There were a surprising number of small, unheard-of kingdoms and principalities in Europe in the 1930s to 1950s
- Most of which had a princess.
- Who was about to go off and do something important for the first time–usually regarding an alliance with a neighbouring kingdom, principality, or back garden
- The princess was about to be kidnapped because of it, and replaced with a lookalike imposter.
- Foreigners were generally A Bad Lot, apart from younger females, who were very nice, although rather prone to being kidnapped
- They needed the help of their English chumsto get out of whatever scrape they were in (apparently foreigners couldn't look after themselves too well).
- Very young female foreigners tended to be orphaned and have a wicked guardian.
- Who was after their secret inheritance.
- The key to which was hidden in a locket
- And the girl required the help of her new English chums to find it
- The locket, trinket, or other key to the fortune or treasure or inheritance would unfailingly turn up in a souvenir stall, curiosity shoppe, bazaar, or other retail outlet of that ilk
- To then be bought (accidentally) by the English girls.
- Who are then pursued by the wicked guardian
- Presumably, if the guardian had invested a little more time decorating his home with nice trinkets, he'd have come across the key a decade ago
- Parents who sense they're about to shuffle off this moral coil and leave their only child orphaned will bequeath their fortune in a secret note; notaries were either too expensive or nonexistent in foreign countries
- Princesses are a bit of a soppy lot; peasant girls tend to have more gumption
- English girls make friends easily, even in a country where they don't speak the language
- Therefore the foreign, uneducated peasant girls presumably all speak fluent English
- 'Foreigners' do not include Americans, who are conspicuously absent from the Girls' Crystal.
- Probably because when they speak, their accents can't be mimicked by writing 'where ees ze key?'
- Parents are also conspicuously absent from these holidays. Either teenage girls were allowed to go abroad by themselves, or the parents were off keeping the American tourists busy and out of the story
- Stone walls are easy to scale, even when wearing a dress
- But if you should come across one that's not so easy, there will likely be a convenient length of rope lying nearby.
- Horses and donkeys are extremely cooperative, especially to English girls
- Animals, in general–even escaped circus ones–tend to like the English and dislike foreigners. Although, given that the animals are native to the foreign country, this means that like foreigners and dislike natives. The point is: animals like the English. As friends, that is, not as lunch
- If you punctuate your speech with expressions like "jolly", "rather" and "I say!" things will generally go well for you.
- If you are prone to frowning, shouting, or being otherwise unfriendly, chances are you are a villain. And things will not go well for you
- Good will always triumph! Or at least, xenophobia will

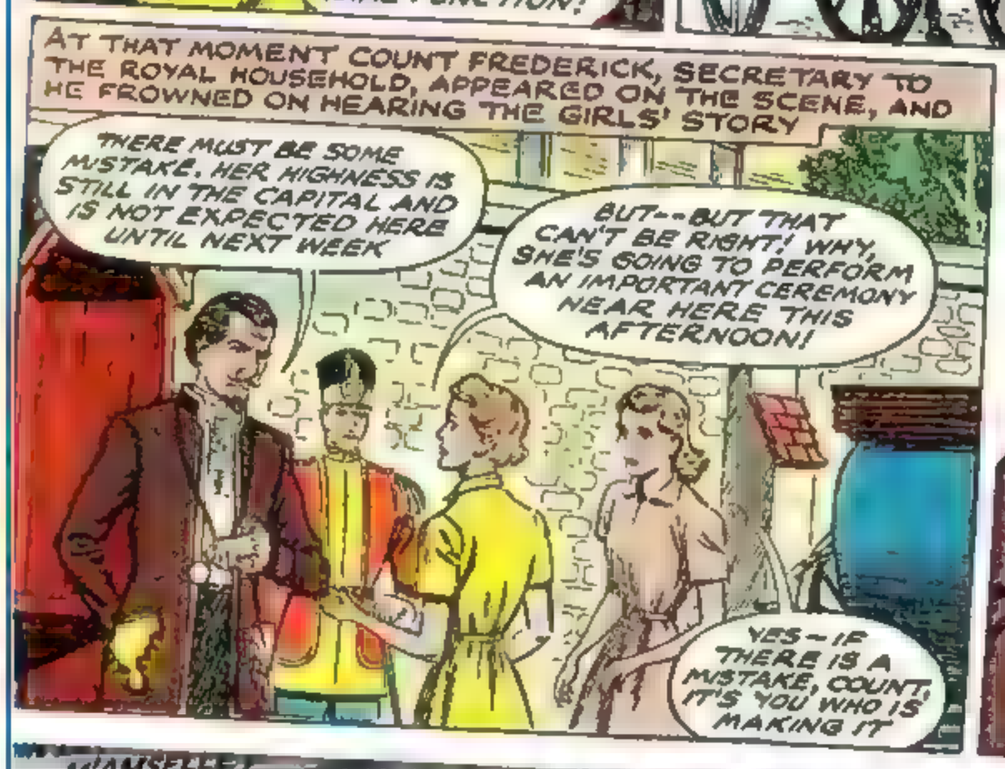
FRIENDS OF THE Vanished Princess

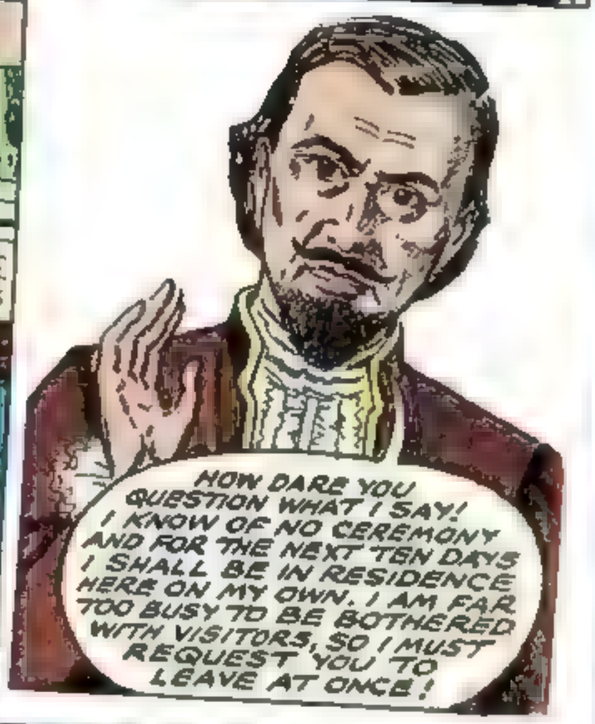
Brenda and Janet Howard were thrilled to receive an invitation from Princess Tina, who had been their great friend at school in Estavia, the picturesque little state where they lived, to stay with her at the Royal Hunting Lodge and attend her very first important ceremony.


THERE'S WHERE WE'RE GOING TO STAY! OH, JANET, WON'T IT BE GRAND TO BEE PRINCESS TINA AGAIN?
RATHER! WE USED TO HAVE FUN TOGETHER AT SCHOOL AND I BET WE HAVE A SIMPLY MARVELLOUS TIME WITH HER AT THE HUNTING LODGE!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS CEREMONY IS TINA MENTIONED IN HER LETTER, BUT I BET SHE'S THRILLED AT BEING ASKED BY THE PRINCE REGENT TO PERFORM IT!
BUT NOT HALF AS THRILLED AS WE SHALL BE TO SEE HER OFFICIATING AT HER VERY FIRST ROYAL FUNCTION!


AT THE ENTRANCE THE SISTERS LEFT THE CARRIAGE ~~
STOP! BY ORDER OF COUNT FREDERICK! NO VISITORS ARE ALLOWED TODAY AT THE HUNTING LODGE


AT THAT MOMENT COUNT FREDERICK, SECRETARY TO THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD, APPEARED ON THE SCENE, AND HE FROWNED ON HEARING THE GIRLS' STORY
THERE MUST BE SOME MISTAKE. HER HIGHNESS IS STILL IN THE CAPITAL AND IS NOT EXPECTED HERE UNTIL NEXT WEEK
BUT--BUT THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT! WHY, SHE'S GOING TO PERFORM AN IMPORTANT CEREMONY NEAR HERE THIS AFTERNOON!
YES – IF THERE IS A MISTAKE, COUNT, IT'S YOU WHO IS MAKING IT


HOW DARE YOU QUESTION WHAT I SAY! I KNOW OF NO CEREMONY AND FOR THE NEXT TEN DAYS I SHALL BE IN RESIDENCE HERE ON MY OWN. I AM FAR TOO BUSY TO BE BOTHERED WITH VISITORS, SO I MUST REQUEST YOU TO LEAVE AT ONCE!

M'AMSELLE?
I WAS TO HAVE SKATED IN ZE GALA ZIS YEAR, BUT MY GUARDIAN FORBADE ME AND I DARE NOT DEFY HIM. BUT IF YOU WILL HELP ME, ALL MAY BE WELL
OF COURSE I'LL HELP YOU, GINA! WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO DO?
AT THAT MOMENT, GINA CAUGHT SIGHT OF AN APPROACHING FIGURE, AND A GASP ESCAPED HER LIPS
OH — MY GUARDIAN, ROCARO! I DARE NOT EXPLAIN NOW FOR HE MIGHT OVERHEAR ME

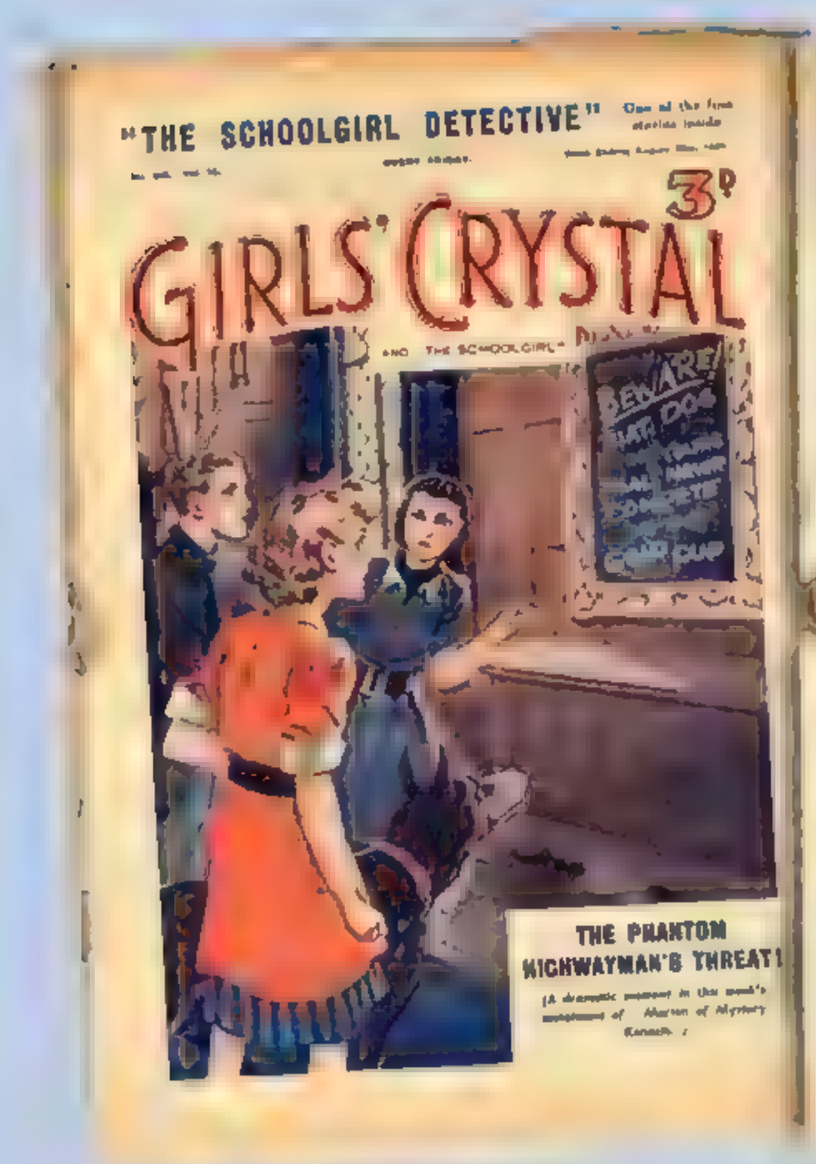
GIRLS' CRYSTAL

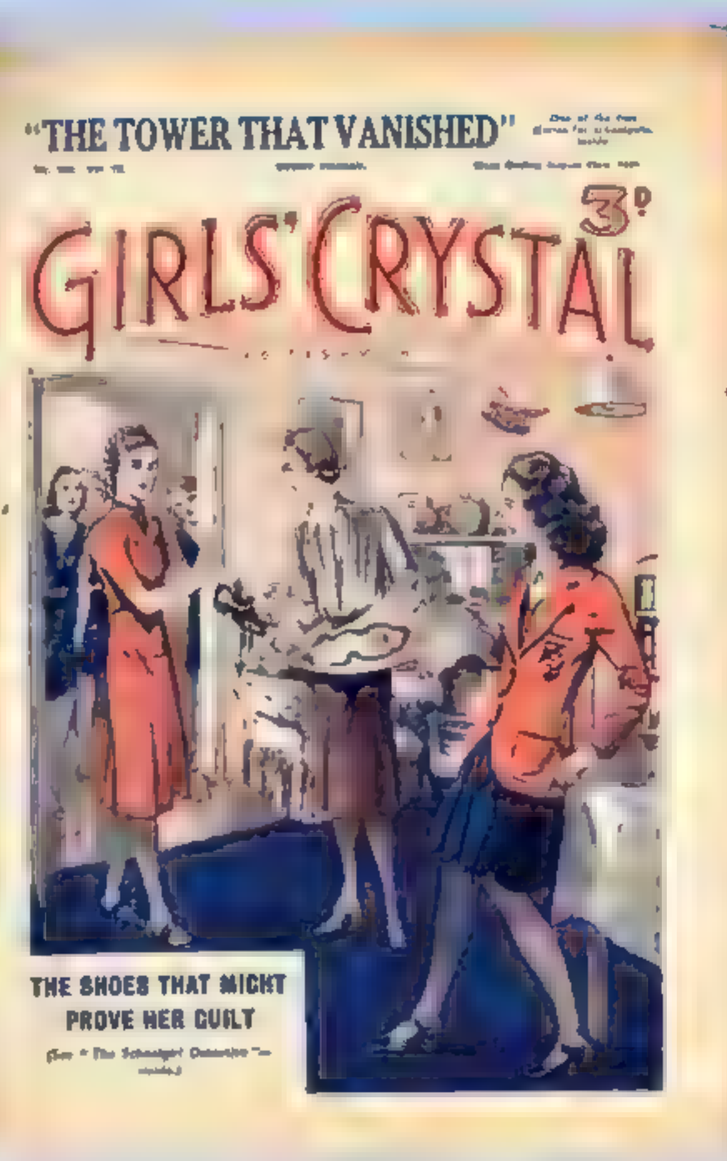
BY TONY INGRAM

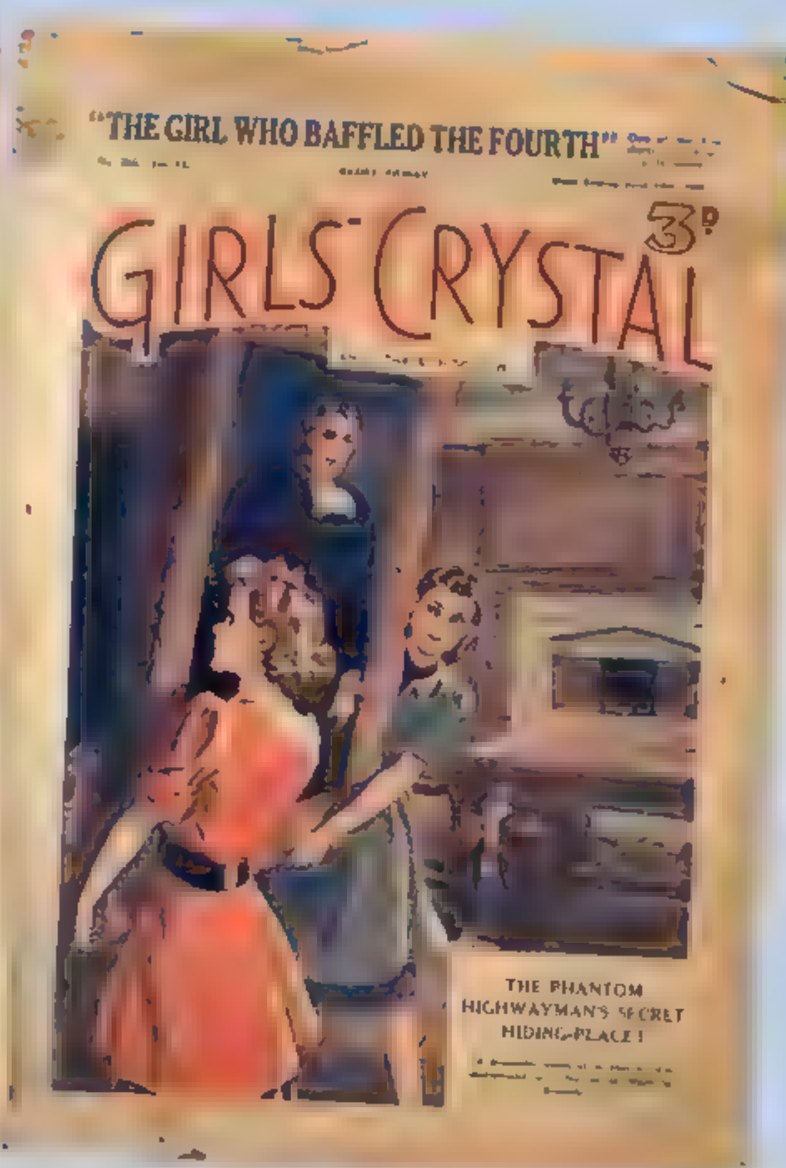
The long running Girls Crystal title actually began as one of Amalgamated Press's story papers on 26 October 1935 (it began life as simply 'The Crystal', becoming 'Girls Crystal' with issue #10). The story papers, as the name implies, were basically papers containing text stories with a few illustrations and were phenomenally popular (others of the time included The Magnet and The Greyfriars Herald, which featured the misadventures of schoolboy glutton Billy Bunter). Edited by C Eaton Fearn (who also wrote stories such as 'Tony the Speed Girl' and 'The Girl Who Baffled the Fourth' for the paper under the pen name Gail Western), unlike the majority of British comics in later decades Girls Crystal actually ran authors credits for the stories; these included Jean Vernon (writer:' the Madcap Form Mistress'), Audrey Nichols ('Nurse Rosemary'), Diana Martin ('She Was a Fugitive'), Hazel Armitage ('The Skating Impostor'), Renee Frazer ('Daughter of the White Sheik') and Peter Langley ('The Menace at the Music School'). Unfortunately, this admirable policy is slightly undermined by the fact that most or all of these names were pseudonyms; in fact, to begin with at least, all the writers were male and even 'Peter Langley' (the only writer credited as male) was actually Ronald Fleming!

From 26 May 1939, the title incorporated 'Schoolgirls Weekly', and from 25 May 1940 absorbed 'The Schoolgirl'. Along the way, it underwent several changes in size and format. For the first nine issues, the cover was in full colour, but then switched to just red and blue (and, for awhile in early 1941, just blue). By late 1941 the full page cover illustration had dropped to less than half a page (the remainder of the cover being text), and the full page illustrations did not return until the 1950's. The page count dropped from 32 to 28 after the first year (issue #52) and dropped again, first to 24 pages (April 1940) and then to 20 due to wartime paper shortages.

By the end of the 1940's, the page count was down to just 12! Fortunately, it crept back up to 20 in the 1950's. The size of the pages also shrank. The paper had already reduced its pages to the same size as those of *The Magnet* by 1938, and reduced again during the war years, in 1940 and 1942. In this however, *Girls' Crystal* was little different to the other publications of the time, some of which shrank to only eight pages! Finally, on 14 March 1953, after 908 issues *Girls' Crystal* bowed to the inevitable and followed in the footsteps of titles such as 'The School Friend', changing from a 'story paper' to a 'comic paper' comprised of strips interspersed with short prose pieces. It lasted as a comic proper until 1963 when it was finally cancelled, though as with many other cancelled titles *Girls' Crystal* annuals continued to appear regularly for some years afterwards, the last one apparently being released in 1975 or '76. ●







We all like to nit-pick (it's good for the soul, apparently), and we all committ random acts of madness. After all we're only human. However, we're keeping an eye on **Tony Ingram** after he asked...

WHAT IF ANT MAN WAS FROM ROMFORD?

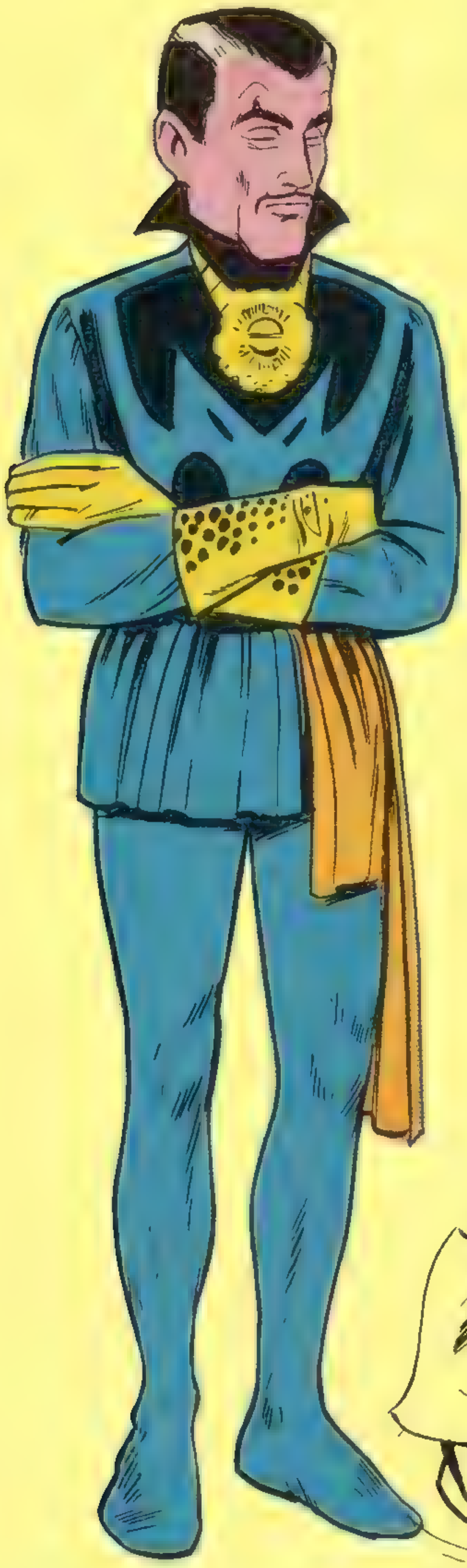
THE STRANGE WORLD OF THE MARVEL STORYBOOK ANNUAL 1968

Over the last few decades a lot of weird and wonderful items have borne the name 'Marvel'. Wallpaper, action figures, underpants, Easter eggs and a thousand more, some directly connected to the comics, others merely desperately trying to make a few quid by cashing in on the brand name of the most complex fictional world since the Greek myths. Few, though, are as thoroughly entertaining, while still managing to completely miss the point on almost every level, as the *World Distributors Marvel Storybook Annual*, one of the weirdest pieces of Marvel ephemera I've encountered in thirty five years as a Marvel fan. It is possibly the single most powerful lesson in the dangers of too little research ever published, every page providing proof positive that the writers (listed in the 1996 Comic Book Price Guide as 'Enefer, Tyson and Elliot') never read a Marvel comic in their lives. And it's absolutely brilliant just because it's so barmy!

So, where did this strange one-off go wrong? Well, to begin with Marvel Comics is of course a comic company, its characters designed for the comic strip medium. And this is a storybook, as its name suggests. Meaning illustrated text stories, not strips. Often very, very strangely illustrated text stories, their half page pictures apparently being carefully chosen not to actually depict anything that was happening in the story, preferring instead to give us some very nice portraits of characters who in a bad light look a bit like some of Marvel's superstars of the sixties. Secondly, while Marvel is now something of an international publishing phenomenon, it was then–and to a large extent still is–an American company publishing mostly American characters... and this book is as British as red phone boxes and *Blue Peter*! Indeed, while a good many of the stories attempt to invoke an international flavour, being set everywhere from the Orkneys to Egypt, the one place specifically not mentioned anywhere in the book (suggesting, I think, a rather perverse deliberate avoidance of it rather than an oversight) is America, the country where most of these characters were previously assumed to live!

First in the story line-up is Ant Man. You remember Ant Man? Scientist Hank Pym, an all-American biophysicist who discovered the secret of shrinking to insect size and conversing with ants, for reasons best known to himself? Yep, that's him. Nice bloke, when he wasn't having nervous breakdowns. Except that the never out of costume Ant Man of 'Fighting Fury', who may or may not be Dr Pym, is very definitely British, having apparently operated for five years in a town which appears to be somewhere north of Watford ever since his first case... which apparently involved getting a boxer named Danny Fury jailed for a burglary which, it eventually

transpires, he didn't actually commit. Why this peculiar variance from established Ant Man lore? Only the writer could tell us that, though I personally suspect it has something to do with his not having been provided with any reference material on who Ant Man actually was and possibly not even realizing he was an established



character. At any rate, the diminutive detective eventually clears Danny and then goes off to catch art thieves at the Tate, so that's alright...

The second story, of a young Namor the Sub-Mariner's first encounter with surface men (a couple of lighthouse keepers) is less area specific, clearly set in the past and therefore easier to associate with Marvel (though the people of Atlantis are depicted as caucasian rather than, as is customary in Marvel comics, blue skinned) but by the time the Fantastic Four arrive in 'The Chains of Abdul Rey', we seem to have inexplicably wandered into a fifties movie serial with our heroes for some reason holidaying in Africa and trying to stop a still quite open and seemingly legal slave trade, hampered slightly by the slightly improbable discovery that when they are captured 'the magnetism in iron chains' prevents them from using their powers(!)

Now if only Doctor Doom had known that, history might have been very different...

Following a quick two page origin recap, we have the only two stories which might possibly be set in the US, first up being Spider-Man in 'The Fire Raisers', which involves the wall crawler stopping an arsonist's insurance scam; I say 'possibly', because Spidey's base of operations is referred to only as 'the city'. And the crooked insurance man is no real challenge for our webbed wonder, any more than 'the Bloated Bandit', a guy in a rubber suit which comes dangerously close to infringing Michelin's copyright, is for Iron Man in 'The Cushioned Clash'. A pity, since the Bandit is about as close as the book ever gets to a genuine super villain! Captain America though does at least have the Nazis to contend with in his firmly 40s bound outing, in which a rather suspiciously tooled up Cap ('Captain America and his youthful aide pulled up sharply, their hands streaking to their guns') and a non costumed Bucky clearly drawn by someone who has never seen Cap's little buddy take on the Afrika Corps while assisting the Desert Rats. Yep, even Captain America cannot actually be depicted as being Stateside!

Iron Man is down under, holidaying in the Outback with his Australian tennis champion girlfriend when a gang of modern day bushrangers terrorise the town where they're staying in 'The Ghost of Ned Kelly'. Horror of horrors, they also cut off the electricity, preventing Tony Stark from recharging his life giving chest plate (a common occurrence in Iron Man stories in the sixties; you'd think a bloke as bright as Tone would have considered the benefits of batteries) but Tony is nonetheless able to don his armour and take them down before falling unconscious and waking up in a hospital with its own generator (reading this, it struck me that Stark is fully aware the

night before that his power is low, but puts off plugging himself into the mains and thereby causes his own problems. If he hadn't, bushranger Black Jack would have lasted about five minutes at the most). Then, it's off to Manchester of all places, as Doctor Strange makes his rather dull debut in 'Guardians of the Tomb'. An oddly oriental looking Doc, apparently on a lecture tour, callously disregards a couple of RAF pilots who've seen something odd in the hills, only to later learn–while in his astral form–that they've gotten themselves trapped in a cave whilst investigating it. Despite racing back to his body to call the police, Doc is utterly useless since by the time they arrive, Geoff and Bill have escaped on their own. Thankfully, the bone idle sorcerer redeems himself later in the book by rescuing another two pilots from a bloodthirsty Hindu sect in India–though he still resents having to get involved! The writer of the Strange tales, I suspect, has indeed encountered him before–but not since his earliest Steve Ditko illustrated adventures, when his heroic credentials were not yet fully known.

The FF, meanwhile, are continuing their long holiday and have moved on to Crete by their second outing in the book. By a startling coincidence, the Thing discovers the entrance to the Minotaur's labyrinth while on a tour. Easily defeating the great bull of Minos by the simple expedient of having the Thing bash its head against a wall, the not all that fabulous foursome escape with the aid of the Invisible Girl's 'feminine intuition', which appears to be about the only useful thing 'timid' Sue has going for her...

On to the north coast of Scotland, where Dr Don Blake (alias the Mighty Thor) is on a steamer heading for some remote island or other to investigate an old Viking colony (Why? Who knows?) when it is attacked by pirates in the pay of a sinister foreign power out to steal a new computer en route to an Air Force radar station. Thor actually comes off rather better than the others in his one outing; his reasons for being in Scotland are highly dubious, but at least he's learned to speak proper English instead of his usual cod Shakespearean! Finally, following Dr Strange's 'Flight into Danger', we have 'The End of the Hulk', in which tortured Dr Bruce Banner and an uncharacteristically well spoken Rick Jones are on a train traveling through the Canadian wilderness when the good doctor seemingly randomly transforms into the Hulk (the writer clearly unaware of any specific reason for the changes) and is attacked by the military. In a staggeringly dumb conclusion Banner, who had apparently been hoping the army would manage to end his misery by killing him, finds a new reason to go on when he thinks of a way to use Gamma rays to cure Bronchitis!

Throw in a few totally spurious features like 'Men of Ideas' (looking at famous scientists from history), a crossword, a maze and some puzzles and you have the perfect Christmas gift.

For 1968, anyway... ●

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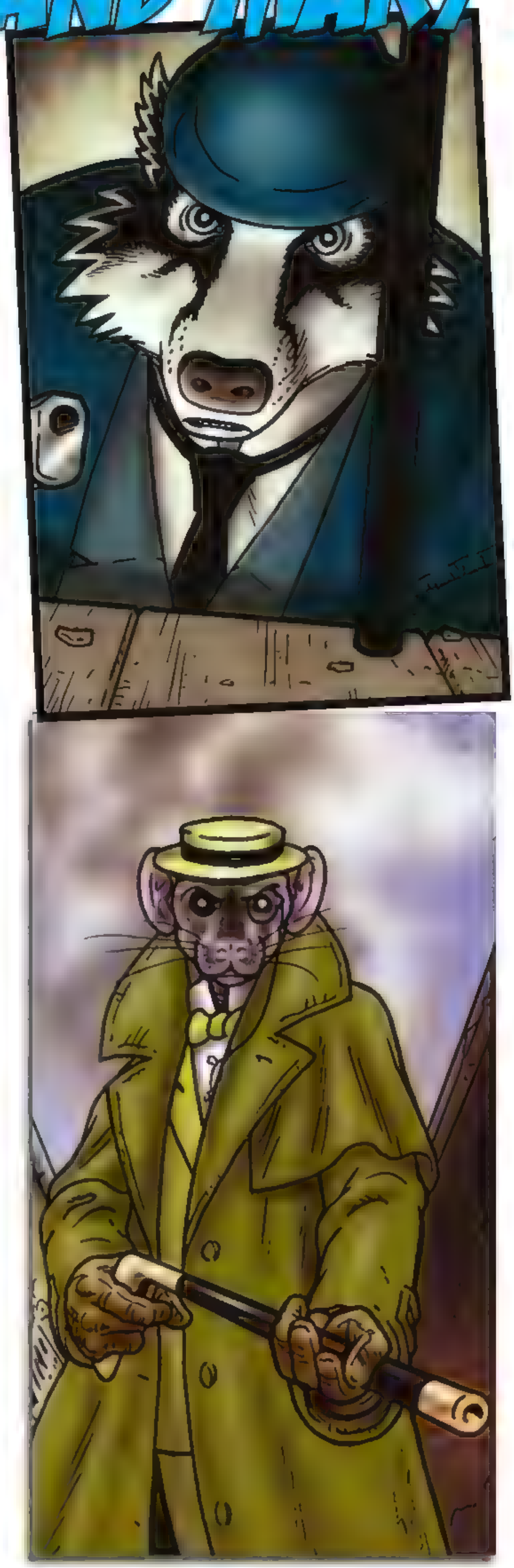
Jack Bauer
Assassin or Fall Guy?

With a rather unusual new project due shortly from the pen of ***Bryan Talbot*** *and his wife* ***Mary****,*
Crikey! *decided to ask them what it's all about...*

INTERVIEW: BRYAN AND MARY TALBOT



Crikey!: Bryan, the last time we spoke, the original *Grandville* was actually just about to come out. Since the latest is book three, I'm assuming it actually worked out quite well?
Bryan: Pretty well. The first edition, by Jonathan Cape, did well enough that the second came out in 2010. It was also released as a digital comic from Dark Horse in America and it's been released in several countries in Europe. It's been translated into French, and other languages. It sells pretty well. It's constantly in print, so is *Grandville Mon Amour* (the sequel).

C!: It helps that they look so beautiful.
B: The new one looks pretty good. It's nicely packaged; it's got a de-bossed cover which means the logo is sunk in, the opposite of embossed, meaning raised. It's nice to keep them looking a bit different each time.

C!: You're hoping to continue with *Grandville*, presumably?
B: I've got it planned out up to book six.

C!: So you had an idea this was going to be a continuing series when you started number one?
B: No, not at all. Not until about halfway through. I had the first story and it was something I wanted to do, though I had no idea if it would do well, and I enjoyed it so much that when it did, I thought why not carry it on.

C!: It's the first time you've done a continuing series for quite awhile, isn't it?
B: Yes, I mean I did *Nemesis* but that was part of someone else's series, that was Pat Mills...
C!: How much of Nemesis did you draw in the end?
B: Three books. Books four, five and six.

C!: Of course, you weren't the original artist on that series...
B: No, that was Kevin. Kev O'Neill.

C!: That's right, you took over from Kevin, and I can't remember who took over from you but it went in a bit of a strange direction after that.
B: I think it was John Hicklenton.

C!: Yes! The late John Hicklenton. It went in a strange direction, I remember that. I kind of lost touch with Nemesis after your period ended. Of course, quite a few people worked on Nemesis.
B: I did quite a bit for *2000AD*.

C!: Your first major series was 'The Adventures of Luther Arkwright'...
B: Yes. Well, I'd had a continuing series before that, in Brainstorm. Chester P Hackenbush, there were three of them. Three Hackenbush stories.

C!: I do remember them. I was about the age to be getting into that sort of stuff at the time, though I don't recall seeing them reprinted...
B: Oh, they have been. They're still being reprinted now. By Brainstorm, they're all still available as a collection.

C!: So, what's actually happening in Grandville number three?
B: It's called *Grandville Bete Noire*. Each Grandville book is subtitled with a French phrase which is familiar to English readers, so the last was Grandville *Mon Amour*, this is Grandville *Bete Noire* and there'll be a Grandville *Femme Fatale*. The first book was like Sherlock Holmes directed by Quentin Tarantino, the

TOP: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LE BROC OF SCOTLAND YARD

RIGHT: LE BROC'S RIGHT HAND...ER, RAT: RODERICK RATZ!

second one was kind of Sherlock Holmes in the style of Alfred Hitchcock, and *Grandville Bete Noire* is sort of like Sherlock Holmes does James Bond.

C!: Sherlock Holmes does James Bond, that's a weird image!
B: I'm not really fond of Bond, not the films, but it's got kind of a Bond villain. It's Grandville doing something that's not quite like James Bond.

C!: That's a good description, I like that. I can't really imagine Grandville with a James Bond setting; there isn't enough plot in a Bond. You're never short on plot.
B: But it does have a Bond type villain. A toad. He's basically Toad.

C!: Or Baron Greenback, from *Dangermouse*?
B: A couple of people have mentioned that. I've never actually seen Greenback. But he is actually a Baron, yes. So I do reference Greenback. I like slipping in references like that.

C!: Oh, excellent!
B: But, yeah, he's basically Mr Toad (from *Wind in the Willows*). Vain, selfish, cowardly...

C!: Toad wasn't actually evil though, was he?
B: He was never actually evil, no–this one is. He's based on him, but he's more evil.

C!: Your basic cast are still the same as in the last two, presumably?

ABOVE: THE ENIGMATIC BILLIE...

BELOW: ART FROM ' DOTTER OF FATHER'S EYES' (TO BE PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 2012)

B: Oh, yeah. Inspector LeBrock's still there, and Roderick Ratzi.

C!: That's not really surprising! I kind of got the impression that was a character that was added as kind of an afterthought but became a bit of a sleeper hit.
B: Some characters are like that, you start to write them and they take on a life of their own, they start writing themselves. At some point, you just start seeing the words appear on the page.

C!: You're not the first writer I've heard say that. That's when you know a character has really come alive. There's always a bit of a literary subtext in your work, isn't there Bryan?
B: I like adding things in that some people will get. Like an homage to a famous French comic character in a surprising setting...

C!: You've got another book coming out soon, haven't you?
B: Yes. 'Dotter of my Father's Eyes'. It's due out in February. It's written by Mary, my wife, and it's a semi-biographical piece based on the daughter of James Joyce.

C!: Interesting. You seem to be working exclusively for the graphic novel market, now?
B: Yes, that's where I aim for, now. Do you want to speak to Mary? She's right here.

C!: Great!
Mary: Hello!

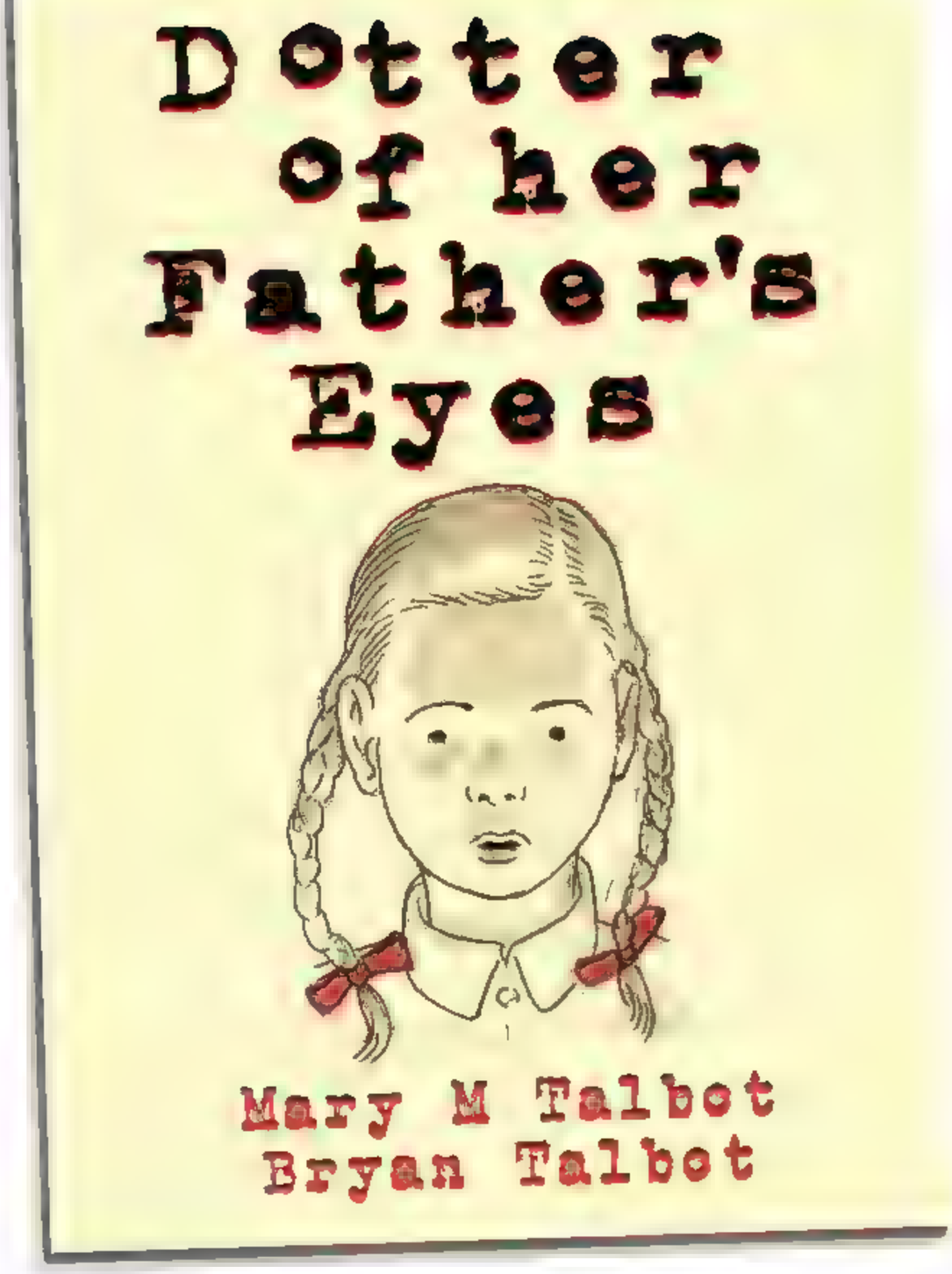
C!: Hello, Mary! Do you want to tell me a bit about the new book?

M: well, it's partly my memoir and partly a biography of James Joyce's daughter.

C!: OK, you're talking to someone who has absolutely no knowledge of the subject! So, why that particular route and why that particular subject?
M: Well, Bryan suggested I write about my childhood, and I couldn't imagine anyone being interested in my childhood, but there were parallels with Joyce's daughter. I've always been interested in social history, in explorations of gender politics. And her story is a good one, if a bit tragic.

C!: I guess her era would have been kind of a pivotal period.
M: She caused quite a bit of scandal. I mean, she was born out of wedlock for a start. And she was mentally ill. A disappointment to her father, as I suppose I was in a way. There were very different attitudes in those days, and parents had very definite ambitions for their daughters.

C!: What were you supposed to be?
M: Well, I was supposed to go to go to Cambridge. Which I did, eventually, as a mature student.



C!: This is your first graphic novel, but presumably not the first thing you've written?
M: No, I've been an academic for 25 years, writing about gender issues, but this is my first use of narrative. It's quite exciting.

C!: It must be quite a learning curve, then?
M: It is, but it's a good way to highlight the issues; the segregation there used to be between boys and girls, even in my time. Nowadays people tend to think that there aren't any differences but things haven't changed that much. Though the days of boys learning compulsory woodwork and girls learning needlework are over now.

C!: So, this is your first graphic novel–it's not going to be your last?
M: Oh, no, no! I've another idea, another script in preparation. There's no publisher yet, though.

C!: All of this stuff is obviously for the graphic novel market, the bookshop market. Bryan doesn't seem to be doing serialized comics anymore. I guess there just aren't the opportunities in that area now.
M: I think the graphic novels are where the opportunities are now.

C!: It's a format that didn't really exist even thirty years ago.
M: And a lot of them sell to female readers. There's a big female market.

C!: Yes–having frequented comic shops

TWO STUNNING COVERS BY BRYAN FROM THE 'GRANVILLE' SERIES– 'GRANDVILLE' AND 'GRANDVILLE-MON AMOUR'. BOTH ARE AVAILABLE FROM JONATHAN CAPE AND ALL GOOD BOOK STORES

for decades, you rarely saw a woman go through the doors!

M: There's a bit of a locker room culture there, I think.

C!: Locker room culture for the guys who would never be allowed into the locker room, I think! When is the book released?

M: Second of February next year. That's James Joyce's birthday. And the date of publication of *Ulysses*.

C!: *Ulysses* is something I've never managed to read–well, that is, I've never managed to finish it!

M: It's not the most reader friendly thing ever written. But it is more readable than *Finnegan's Wake*!

C!: Thanks for talking to *Crikey!*, Mary!

M: Thank you!

C!: Hello, Bryan. As I said to Mary, you aren't working in serialized comics any more. Do you think they're on the way out?

B: I think they are, yes. It's inevitable.

C!: Obviously, this is the first digital *Crikey!*, do you think digital comics are the way forward? There's a lot of talk about what DC are doing in America, about their big push into the digital market, but a lot of comics readers are still collectors, aren't they?

B: There'll still a market for a physical product. Digital is the future in a way, but in a way I wish it wasn't. Hopefully the actual graphic novel will survive. I try to make mine nice articles, nice things to hold, I put in endpapers. I think people like to own actual things.

C!: There's just something about having something there that you can hold in your hand, isn't there? When's the next *Grandville* due out?

B: End of 2012.

C!: You're going to have to end the series with a retrospective one and call it *Grandville Déjà vu*...

B: Believe it or not, that's on my list of titles!

C!: Thanks for taking the time to talk to us, Bryan.

B: No problem! ●

As the 'definitive' Royal Marine Commando, Captain Hercules Hurricane's wartime exploits were nothing if not extraordinary–during his 'time' in the service of his King and his country, he witnessed the retreat from Dunkirk; saw action at El Alamein; fought against the Italians in the push to take Rome; sweated in Burma; and waded ashore during the D Day landings. Crikey! *sent* **Stephen Hooker** *to get the low-down on one of Britain's most enduring heroes...*

"GREAT BLISTERING BILGES YOU SCURVY SWABS!"

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAPTAIN HERCULES HURRICANE

I loved the smell of war comics in the morning. Once, I went to a paper shop and, you know, that smell, that cheap, printed paper smell. I didn't find one over priced American, spandex clad, superhero comic worth paying any attention to. But that smell; that smell of UK war comics...it smelt like...*victory*.

War comics, however, were in a tailspin. And, I suspect, publishers were keen to explore other genres, whilst keeping men in conflict as a draw.

Enter the *Valiant*.

A comic book which encompassed: war, comedy, science fiction, western, mystery, thriller, supernatural and adventure in easily accessible weekly chunks. A Smorgasbord or scatter-gun approach? Who knows? It just worked.

I missed the birth of the *Valiant*, 6 October 1962, published, as it was, eight days before I was born. I would discover its appeal in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as my reading tastes developed and broadened. The *Valiant* would go on to leave an indelible mark on my comic reading soul.

Without a doubt the star of the *Valiant*, to my unbiased mind, in his wartime exploits, taking the fight (possibly to the sound of a ringside bell) to the enemy, was one Royal Marine Commando. The relentless, the built like a brick outhouse (fanfare if you please) Captain Hercules Hurricane.

True, by the mid 1970s, Captain Hurricane's participation in WW2 was more slap-stick than most of his contemporaries, like Battler Britton, whose theatre of war was grimmer and, in comparison, more stolid. Captain Hurricane's contorted war face and real need for anger management courses (no doubt like those advertised in the Guardian newspaper), had a certain something that made reading his war torn adventures totally habitual. Then again, as an only child, and minus a father, I was prone to take my father-figures where I could read them.

Part of Captain Hurricane's charisma was his sea-faring vocabulary, with which he assaulted friends, allies and the enemy alike. Hurricane dispensed

(BELOW): THE CAPTAIN DISCOVERS THAT MAGGOT HAS FORGOTTEN TO CUT HIS BREAD INTO SOLDIERS
ART BY R CHARLES ROYLANCE

such worldly wise statements such as: "Great Blistering barrels o' boiled bloaters!", "Avast there, you sponge-faced swab!", "Split me spinnaker an' polish me portholes with potted paste!" to the equally understandable: "Sink me sideways in a tubful o' tadpoles, I ain't enjoyed myself so much for weeks".

All, whilst on the driest of land.

He was not alone in his quest to duff up every enemy solider he ran into. His faithful sidekick, batman and personal valet, Maggot Malone was at his side throughout. Malone, pint-sized, slight of build, could easily have been the brains of the outfit; often he would have to engineer a situation where Captain Hurricane lost his temper and the red mist descended, to get them both out of a jam. Except, sometimes, Malone's help hindered the Captain's war effort.

In *Valiant*'s 1971 annual, Malone, accused of being unimaginative by Captain Hurricane, takes on a whole German Division with a combine harvester. Which, naturally, sends Hurricane off the deep end, suggesting that Hurricane might have been a bit of a stickler for how the enemy was engaged; fists and sea-faring terminology okay, farming equipment most certainly *verboten*.

Fond of a cup o'char, Malone took his batman status seriously, brews and meals of army issue corned beef for the Captain would appear on a regular basis to keep those fighting fists in tip top condition. Although when Malone tried to get Hurricane to take up yoga, he was met with the Captain's usual short shrift: "Malone, you mutinous little swab!".

In 1st June 1974 issue, when the *Valiant* had assimilated (resistance was, apparently, futile even back then) the *Lion*, Captain Hurricane and Maggot Malone were teamed up with the Steel Commando, a sort of low rent Archie The Robot. Steel Commando's operator, a slacker of the worse kind only seemed to upset the harmonics of the teamwork that Hurricane and Malone had established over the years. The strained relationship did not last long and by August 1974 Captain Hurricane and Malone were back to a more >

(BELOW): VALIANT ANNUAL 1969 COVER ILLUSTRATION BY GEOFF CAMPION

(ABOVE): VALIANT ANNUAL 1969 REAR COVER ILLUSTRATION BY GEOFF CAMPION
(TOP): STRIP ART BY R CHARLES ROYLANCE

readable (seconds away, round three) fisticuffs flying twosome.

As Royal Marine Commandos, Captain Hurricane and Maggot Malone's wartime exploits saw the pair in the 1940 British Expeditionary Force, retreating to Dunkirk; had them stationed at El Alamein in 1942; billeted to Italy for the push to Rome; posted to Burma in 1944 for a brief spell; before becoming heavily involved in the 1944 D Day landings.

Alas, ye landlubbering dogs, all good things come to and end. After 713 issues, Davy Jones locker beckoned, and the *Valiant* took a subordinate role, merged with IPC's full time war comic, *Battle* on 23 October 1976. Ironically, war comics were experiencing something of a brief renascence in the mid 70s; the kibosh that was *2000AD* was still a year away.

But I, you know, digress (but on the upside I am seeking therapy).

Battle soldiered on and *Valiant* disappeared from the logo when *Action* merged with *Battle* on 19 November 1977. And the *Valiant* upped stumps and returned to the pavilion, taking its opening grand batsman Captain Hurricane in for an early bath too.

Damn your eyes, *2000AD*! (and psychosis aversion treatment).

My own perception, for what it's worth, is that some might find Captain Hurricane a difficult character to fully represent in UK comic book history. And that somehow we might need to air-bush out the good Captain's place in that history too, now that we are all Europeans and drive Japanese cars.

It is worth noting though, that Captain Hurricane was a product of his time, set in the context of war, where German, Japanese and Italian soldiers were referred to in a certain way. And context is an important element to understand and grasp before slipping into an easy and simplistic judgemental mode. Please do not be embarrassed by the terminology employed in the pages of Captain Hurricane; that was then and this is now.

Or, as Captain Hercules Hurricane would probably say on the subject: "Blistering bulwarks! Laughed at! Jeered at. Sneered at. All you lily livered swabs take heed, I might be gone but I'm not forgotten!" ●

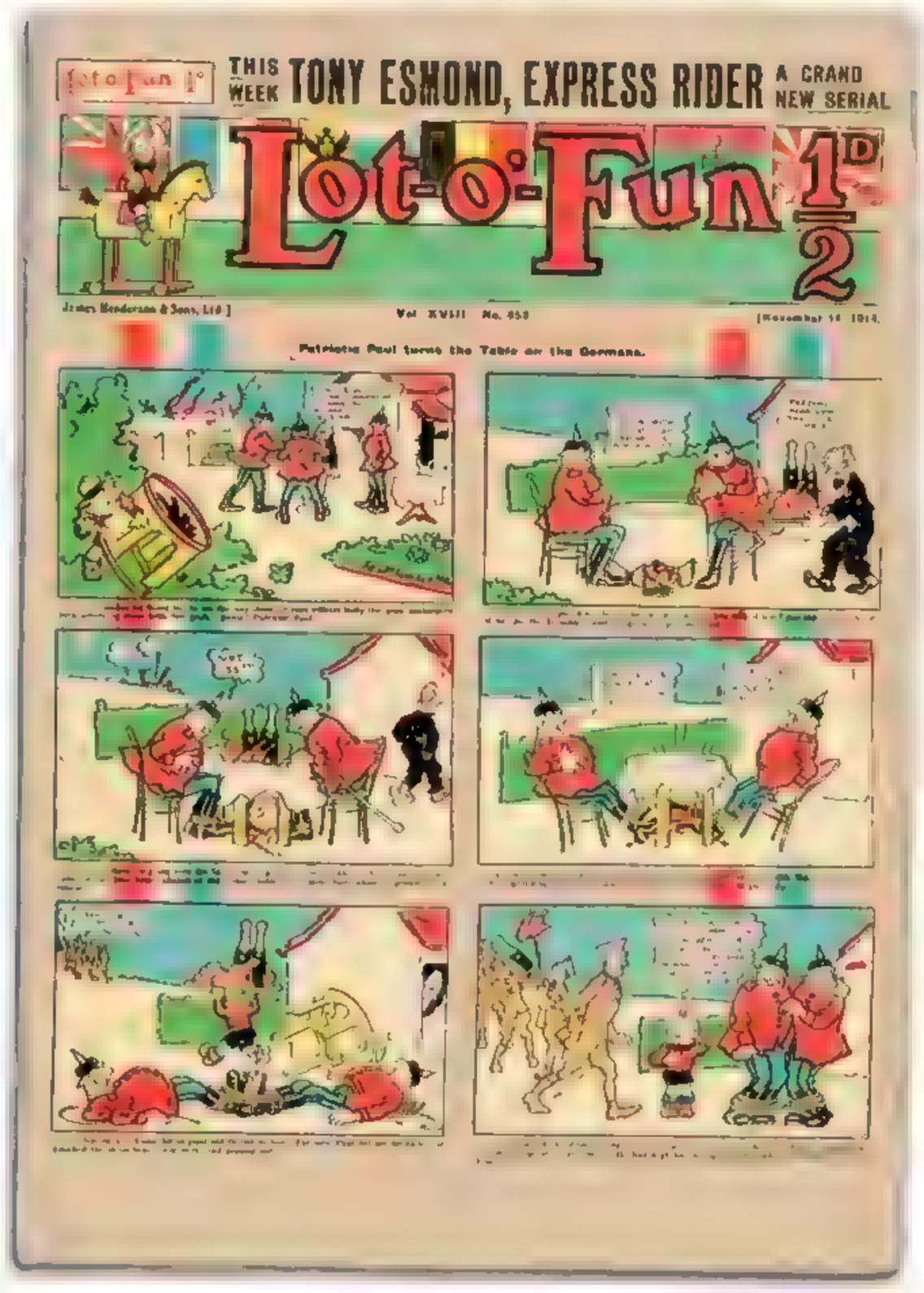
The history of comics in Britain goes back a long way, all the way back to the first issue of Funny Folks in 1874, but they were originally intended for a variety of age groups-notably, the semi-literate working classes-and frequently dealt in political satire. Tony Ingram takes us back through time when comics were quite, quite different...

OH, WHAT A LOVELY WAR: COMICS VS. THE KAISER

BY TONY INGRAM

LONG, LONG TIME AGO...

By the early years of the twentieth century though, publishers had realised that their primary market was children, and a multitude of titles specifically aimed at them were on sale: Puck (1904-1940), Butterfly (1904-1940), Playbox (1904-1910), Lot O' Fun (1906-1929), Picture Fun (1909-1920), Jester and Wonder (1902-1912; Jester was relaunched in 1912 and lasted another eight years minus Wonder), Merry & Bright (1910-1935), the relaunched Funny Wonder (1915-1940; the original had run from 1893-1901 before merging with Jester) and a host of others-including, of course, the legendary Comic Cuts and Illustrated Chips (both of which began in 1890 and lasted until well into the 1950's). As you might guess from some of the titles, most of these were aimed at eight to twelve year olds, but tended to veer more towards eight than twelve. And yet the comics still weren't done with politics or social commentary, as became very apparent during the period erroneously known as 'the war to end all wars'.



PATRIOTIC PAUL HARRIES THE HUN IN 'LOT O' FUN'

WE'LL HAVE FUN, FUN, FUN...

In the years leading up to the first World War, these comics consisted largely of fairly innocuous strips, text stories or single cartoons featuring characters like Dreamy Daniel (a tramp who had vivid and improbable daydreams which adorned the back page of Lot O' Fun), Shipwrecked Sam & Marooned Mike (also Lot O' Fun), Charlie Chaplin (whose comic strip adventures ran in The Funny Wonder) and 'The Merry Adventures of Weary Willie & Tired Tim, the World Famous Tramps' (who featured in Illustrated Chips, and must surely have had one of the longest strip titles in comics). Most of these were mildly amusing (allegedly) and wholly inoffensive stories about amiable characters getting into and out of not very serious scrapes, and but for the clothing styles, they could have been written at any time over a period of about fifty or sixty years. They contained nothing that tied them to any specific time or place, and nothing that would necessitate the reader ever thinking about anything beyond what was on the page. But the war, when it came, intruded rudely into this timeless world.

While certain nursery orientated titles, such as 'The Rainbow' ("the children's paper that parents approve of", and just as dull as it sounds), carried on pretty much as normal, most of those aimed at a slightly older readership were suddenly acknowledging events in the adult world to a degree they never had before. Comic Life's cover starring Fat Tramps were outwitting spectacularly inept Germans, while within the comics pages, text stories told of deeds of derring do behind enemy lines and Wotto the War Artist was sinking submarines with the aid of friendly whales, while Pyjama Percy and Balmy Bill ran off German spies who'd sneaked across the channel. They even ran a one panel feature on the cover, beside the title, depicting 'Soldiers of our allies', a kind of train spotter's guide to friendly uniforms-though quite how much chance there was of a schoolboy in Luton ever seeing an Algerian soldier I'm not quite sure. Picture Fun celebrated Christmas 1914 with 'Brimstone Bobs and that brick Billy Belgium' (who?) spoiling the Kaiser's Christmas present (an 'electric soldier', which while undoubtedly impressive seemed slightly cumbersome as it rolled along on wheels and seemed to have very limited movement) on the cover while inside, 'Cuffy the Colonial and Sinjin the Sikh' stole his Generals' Christmas puddings. And yes, Cuffy and Sinjin were indeed as gloriously un-PC as they sound, in these unenlightened times! Bounderby Bouncer the War

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER, USUAL PRICE, One Halfpenny.

PICTURE FUN

1D. PICTURE FUN

THE BRIGHTEST PAPER ON EARTH

[No. 267, Vol. IX.] PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY ONE HALFPENNY. December 26, 1914.

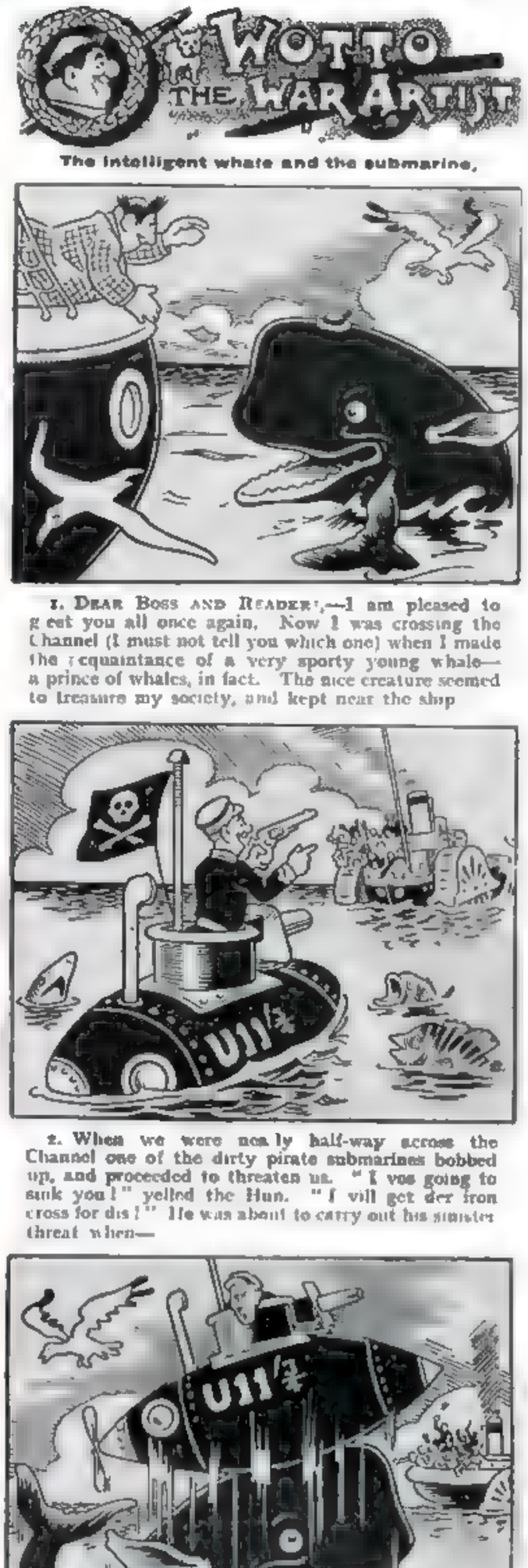
BRIMSTONE BOBS AND THAT BRICK BILLY BELGIUM SPOIL THE KAISER'S XMAS BOX

SO, JUST WHO ON EARTH WERE BRIMSTONE BOBS AND THAT BRICK, BILLY BELGIUM?

Correspondent appeared weekly in Funny Cuts, while Lot O' Fun gave over its front cover to the adventures of Patriotic Paul, a boy scout who popped up in various unlikely locations in Britain and on the continent (how he got around, we don't know), helping out our brave Tommies. Inside, the more literate could thrill to 'the adventures of Pontifex Shrewd at the war' (who came up with these names!!?) or of Jack Buller, fighting 'For Britain's Honour'. Even the likes of Dreamy Daniel were affected. Dan, in one strip, tries to get fit in case he's needed to fight at the front (he ends up galloping down the high street on a vaulting horse which has turned into the real thing), while less overt reminders of the conflict seeped into other strips; when Parkin tries to bag a stag for his dinner, the plucky poacher is almost thwarted when an eagle tries to make off with his hard won meal. "It must have been a German eagle", suggests a wry narrator in a caption box.

I CAN SING A RAINBOW...

The point of all these features is fairly obvious. They were propaganda, nothing more or less, and not just for the kids at home-a surprising number of these eight page throwaways found their way into the hands of soldiers at the front (there is a panel in an instalment of the classic early '80's World War I strip Charley's War, a meticulously researched strip, which shows a soldier in the trenches reading a copy of The Rainbow, a title which had a target audience aged about six. Presumably, he was a late developer). The tone of these stories varies, the text pieces obviously tending to be less


WOTTO THE WAR ARTIST

The intelligent whale and the submarine.

1. DEAR BOSS AND READERS,—I am pleased to greet you all once again. Now I was crossing the Channel (I must not tell you which one) when I made the acquaintance of a very sporty young whale—a prince of whales, in fact. The nice creature seemed to treasure my society, and kept near the ship

2. When we were nearly half-way across the Channel one of the dirty pirate submarines bobbed up, and proceeded to threaten us. "I vos going to sunk you!" yelled the Hun. "I vill get der iron cross for dis!" He was about to carry out his sinister threat when—

3. Up came the intelligent whale I was telling you about, right under the pirate submarine. The German craft was lifted clean out of the water. "Vot vos?" cried the Hun. "Vot vos up? Then the whale laughed. "Just wait a minute!" the clever creature grinned.

4. Yes; that whale turned on the water supply, and that pirate submarine was up the spout! Giving three hearty cheers for that whale, we continued our journey. What adventures do fall to the lot of—Yours well at the front, WOTTO.

(ABOVE & OPPOSITE):
FROM THE PAGES OF COMIC LIFE

comedic, but the Germans are invariably wicked and cowardly, the British noble and brave, and our foreign allies plucky if slightly uncouth and sometimes rather dim. Even the less savoury tactics used by the British are justified in some of the text pieces, by passages about as subtle as a shovel over the head ("I don't like this stink pot fighting", says a General, on the subject of using poison gas. "Quite so, Sir", replies the protagonist, "but we may as well fight the Germans with their own weapons". Quote courtesy of 'The Grey Gas' in Comic Life #3, July 1915). There is never any doubt that the enemy are both evil and stupid, and that Britain will win through. Which relentless blind optimism must have become a bit wearing after four years, but then presumably the simple fact that the war seemed to have no end in sight also had something to do with it-the 12 year olds reading about these plucky soldiers might well have been needed as plucky soldiers if it carried on for a few more years!

AND IN THE END...

Once the war was over of course, the emphasis in the comics shifted back to the same timeless escapist fantasy they had specialised in before, the 1920's and early '30's in particular proving to be something of a boom period for the industry with an array of long running titles like Film Fun (1920-1962), Tiger Tim's Weekly (1920-1940) and DC Thomson's famous 'Big Five' story papers Adventure, Skipper, Rover, Wizard and Hotspur rising to fill the void left by the comics that had fallen by the wayside during the hostilities. Newspaper strips prospered too, with the Daily Mirror's Pip, Squeak and Wilfred being awarded their own Annuals (appropriate, since the Mirror was launched by Amalgamated Press partly on the profits from their Comic Cuts and Illustrated Chips comics). The mid thirties, more significantly, gave us the world's longest running comic titles in the Beano and the Dandy, as well as the beautiful Mickey Mouse Weekly. The country may have been in a depression, but you'd never have known it from the comics, which once again provided an escape from harsh reality into a simpler, better world, untroubled by such tedious considerations as poverty and hunger.

"PUCK," 2d :: Better :: Than Ever
PUCK ANNUAL FOR 1925
Price Six Shillings At all Booksellers
Puck 2d
THE AMUSING ADVENTURES OF ANGEL AND HER MERRY PLAYMATES
PUCK ANNUAL 1925

HERE WE GO AGAIN...

And then, in 1939, the nation's peace was shattered again, as war broke out once more. And again, the comics were overcome with patriotic fervour as The Dandy gave us Sam Fair's 'Addie & Hermy' (two buffoons who were supposed to be Hitler and Goering) and The Beano the same creator's 'Musso the Wop (he's a big-a-da-flop)', based on Mussolini, with other characters and titles following their lead-far more so, in fact, than they had in the first war! In fact, 'Jester' seems to have gotten comicdom's contribution to the war effort underway before it was even declared, their response to the Munich crisis in 1938 being to send 'Basil & Bert, our very private detectives' into Taterland, to contend with the evil Dick Tater! Once war broke out, Dick was revealed as 'Ateful Adolf, leader of the Doublecross Party. Soon, Desperate Dan was hurling missiles into Germany from afar and Constable Cuddlecook was pounding the beat enforcing the blackout. It seems in times of crisis, even comics must wake up and smell the coffee-but only if the bullets are flying! Perhaps some things in the outside world are just too big to ignore, even in the normally safe confines of Beanotown.

Whatever the case, at these times when everyone was needed to play their part, the comics weren't found lacking. Patriotic Paul, we salute you: and may your Woggle never wilt!

Dispute over ownership and copyright in relation to comic characters is as old as the comics themselves. In this article **Stephen Poppitt** *takes a closer look at the problems behind the problems ...*

LAW & ORDER

A Brief History of IPC

The Amalgamated Press, the oldest forerunner to *IPC*, first began publishing comics and magazines, such as *Comic Cuts* and *Illustrated Chips*, in 1890.

After half a century in publishing, the *Amalgamated Press* changed its name, in 1959, becoming *Fleetway Productions*; and then merged with *George Newnes Publishers* and *Odhams Press* in 1963, to become the *International Publishing Company* (IPC).

In 1968 IPC bought the *Daily Mirror* newspaper, thereby becoming the *IPC-Mirror Group*. Two years later, in 1970, the group was purchased by *Reed International*, who in 1974 divided it in two: forming *Mirror Group Newspapers* and *IPC Magazines Ltd*.

The latter was a gathering together, under one publishing umbrella, of all the comics and magazines which had been acquired through the various mergers. Subsequently, some of *IPC*'s comics holdings became a separate division, called *Fleetway Publications*, in 1987.

That division was offered for sale in 1991, and was purchased by *Egmont UK Ltd*. They promptly merged it with their existing publishing arm, *London Editions*, creating a business called *Fleetway Editions*: a name under which they traded for the next ten years. In 2002, however, the company reverted to its former name of *Egmont*.

In 1998 the remainder of *IPC Magazines* was sold to a venture capital group called *Cinven*, which re-named it *IPC Media Ltd* in the year 2000, prior to selling it to *Time Inc* (the publishing division of giant American company *Time-Warner*) in 2001.

AGREEMENT TO DIVIDE THE RIGHTS

With one or two specified exceptions, *IPC Media* currently owns every IPC comics character created before 1970, while *Egmont / Fleetway* owns every character created thereafter. *IPC* thus owns such titles as *Lion*, *Valiant*, *Pow!*, *Tiger* and their respective characters; while *Egmont / Fleetway* owns *Cor!*, *Action*, *Battle* and suchlike, together with all their respective characters.

The dividing line is 1st January 1970, since *Fleetway* owns those characters which were published for the first time in 1970 itself, such as *Adam Eterno*: who first appeared in issue 1 of *Thunder*, published in October 1970.

The main exception to this arrangement is a group of 26 specifically-named characters who appeared in *Buster*, specifically *The Leopard of Lime Street* and various humour characters including Buster himself; for *Buster* was still being published at the time when the agreement for the sale of *Fleetway* was made. The general rule thus does not apply to those characters, which under the terms of the sale are owned by Egmont.

Two other exceptions are *Dan Dare* and soccer star *Roy of the Rovers*, each of whom was sold off seperately long ago.

Such were the terms of the

agreement for the sale of Fleetway: that it owned only the rights to certain titles, with *IPC* retaining ownership of all the publisher's rights in all comics and characters which had been published before 1970, including all editions of the comics in which those characters appeared which were printed after 1970.

Fleetway thus does not own all the titles published in or after 1970, but (with the exception of *Buster*) only those which began publication after that date.

FOREIGN STRIPS

But ownership, as between *IPC* and *Fleetway*, is not cut and dried, even if the companies themselves believe so.

For example, at one time in the early sixties *Lion* included a character called *Cedric the Celt*. This was a translation, under a new name, of the popular French comic strip *Asterix the Gaul*, created and owned by two Frenchmen, Rene Goscinny and Albert Uderzo.

In fact quite a number of foreign strips were licenced for publication in British comics. The terms of the licence allowed the British publisher to reprint them for a fixed period of years only; and it did not include a right to exploit the actual characters, merely to reprint existing strips. Today, with those licences having long since expired, the rights to the characters involved no longer belong to IPC.

As a further example, it's well known that a number of foreign studios, based predominantly in Spain, produced strips for IPC comics in the Sixties. This practice developed because it was a cheap source of comic art for the publisher. However, in recent years some of these foreign artists, or their estates, have claimed the copyright in their work. This was the normal continental practice; for it was not usual in France or Spain for the artist to sign away his rights.

In point of fact, the position is exactly the same in Britain. Under the

ASTERIX THE GAUL
ART BY ALBERT UDERZO

Copyright Act 1956, the copyright in a page of comic art belongs to the artist, unless he signs a written transfer of his copyright in favour of the publisher, which was not common practice in Britain in the Sixties.

BUT WHAT DID IPC ACTUALLY OWN?

This ownership of characters and comics refers, of course, only to such rights as IPC actually owned. In the sixties, a publisher usually owned only the so-called 'publishers copyright': a copyright in the layout and typographical arrangement of each weekly comic.

The copyright in the actual artwork and dialogue making up a page of comic book art belonged to the artist and the writer, unless they were employed by the publisher. However, in the sixties, most were self-employed freelances. And although it was legally possible for a freelance artist or writer to transfer ownership of his copyright to the publisher (this was known as an 'assignment' of copyright), this was not common practice in the sixties or seventies.

But proving the point in court, one way or the other, would take time and a great deal of money; so both parties would have to consider the actual value of some long-dead character in today's marketplace.

PUBLISHERS COPYRIGHT

The publisher always had a separate copyright of its own in the typographical arrangement of each issue of a comic, known as publishers copyright. In other words, it had an overall copyright in the layout of each published issue. This is what, in effect, prevented somebody else photocopying a comic in its entirety and re-printing it for sale himself.

An artist could not have prevented that. As he has rights only in his own artwork, he has copyright to only a small part of a 40 page comic; just the 2 or 3 pages he drew himself. It's the publisher who has an overall copyright in the entire 40 page issue.

But it's a mistake to think of a publisher as 'owning' a strip. The artwork was not owned by *IPC*, but by the artist and writer. Thus neither *IPC* nor *Egmont* can

ADAM ETERNO
THROUGH THE DARKNESS OF TIME AND SPACE WHIRLED THE STRANGE FIGURE OF ADAM ETERNO... DOOMED TO LIVE FOR EVER UNLESS STRUCK A FATAL BLOW BY A WEAPON OF SOLID GOLD!
BY MITRA! ONCE MORE THE WINDS OF FATE CARRY ME BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING! WHAT INJUSTICE OR EVIL WILL I BE CALLED ON TO FIGHT THIS TIME?
ADAM WAS NOT LONG LEFT IN DOUBT!
THE DARK AGES OF SEVENTH CENTURY BRITAIN! THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR! BUT THESE ARE NO COURTLY KNIGHTS, WHO WOULD PERSECUTE HELPLESS VILLAGERS!
HELP ME, GOOD SIR! I FEAR SLAVERY IN THE GOLD MINES OF ENDLESS TOIL!
GOLD MINES! CROM, THE VERY NAME OF THAT ACCURSED METAL BRINGS TERROR TO MY MIND!
BUT ADAM COULD NOT STAND BY AND SEE THE BOY STRUCK HELPLESSLY DOWN!
GUHHH..?
TO ME, MY BROTHERS! WE HAVE ONE HERE OF NO ORDINARY STRENGTH ... ONE WITH THE MAGIC OF MERLIN HIMSELF!
COME ONE, COME ALL! I FEAR NOTHING FROM YOUR BLADES!
BACK, BLACKGUARD! MERE STEEL HOLDS NO DANGER FOR ADAM ETERNO!

ABOVE: ADAM ETERNO FROM XXXX ART BY IAN KENNEDY

prevent them a strip being re-printed, if the artist and writer have retained their copyright in it.

THE ARTISTS AND WRITERS

The artist who drew a strip - for example, the *Adam Eterno* strip - owned what was known as the'authors copyright' in his drawings. Similarly, the writer who wrote the strip owned the authors copyright in the written aspects of that strip, such as the dialogue and boxed captions.

There can be joint ownership of copyright in a page of comic art, just as there is in newspaper strip syndication, where the writer and artist are not the same person. They own the copyright in the work jointly, since it's a collaboration. Royalties from reprinting the work thus go to both of them.

As a freelance, a writer or artist has no contract of employment with the publisher. The situation is different in the case of an employee, because work created in the course of employment will belong, as a matter of law, to the employer. But in the comics industry of the 1960s the artists and writers were self-employed.

They were paid a piece-work rate, and given a seperate contract for each job. To have been employees they would have had to have been employed on a permanent basis, and paid a weekly or monthly salary, and pay tax on a PAYE basis, and pay employee's National Insurance contributions, and have legal rights restricting the publisher's ability to sack them.

But artists and writers were not engaged on that basis. Editors and other in-house staff were; but artists and writers were not. Thus the comic art they created did not belong to their employer, because they didn't have one.

Alternatively, an artist or writer might sign his rights away by a written 'assignment' of his copyright (a written transfer of its ownership) in favour of the publisher. But it was the usual practice in the sixties for publishers not to bother obtaining a written assignment. The contract between *IPC* and its writers and artists did not provide for that in most cases; so the writers and artists continue to own the copyright in the strips they worked on.

TRADEMARKS

In essence, a fictional character is merely a name. But in law you can't own a name; the nearest you can come is owning a Trademark.

So in considering what *IPC* actually owned, one question is whether they ever registered the names of the characters as trademarks, since that is the only way to protect a name. Without a trademark, you have literally nothing: a fictional character (unlike a page of artwork) is a mere nothing. The only ownership worth a bean is ownership of the trademark.

To own a character, and so be able to restrict that character's use by other people, you have to own the trademark. And ownership requires registration of the character's name, which either the publisher or the artist or writer could do. In practice, though, it was not done by anyone.

Characters were usually created by

Please note that this article is only journalism, not legal advice. Nor does it reflect the views of the publisher.

IPC's in-house staff, rather than by the artist who drew the strip. For instance, in the case of *Adam Eterno* the character was created by Jack Legrand, the managing editor at *Fleetway*. An editor was an employee at *Fleetway*; so the characters he created in the course of his employment belonged to his employer, as a matter of employment law.

Accordingly, an Editor had no claim to ownership of the characters. But the employer had a legitimate claim to own them; and so could, if it chose, apply to register a trademark.

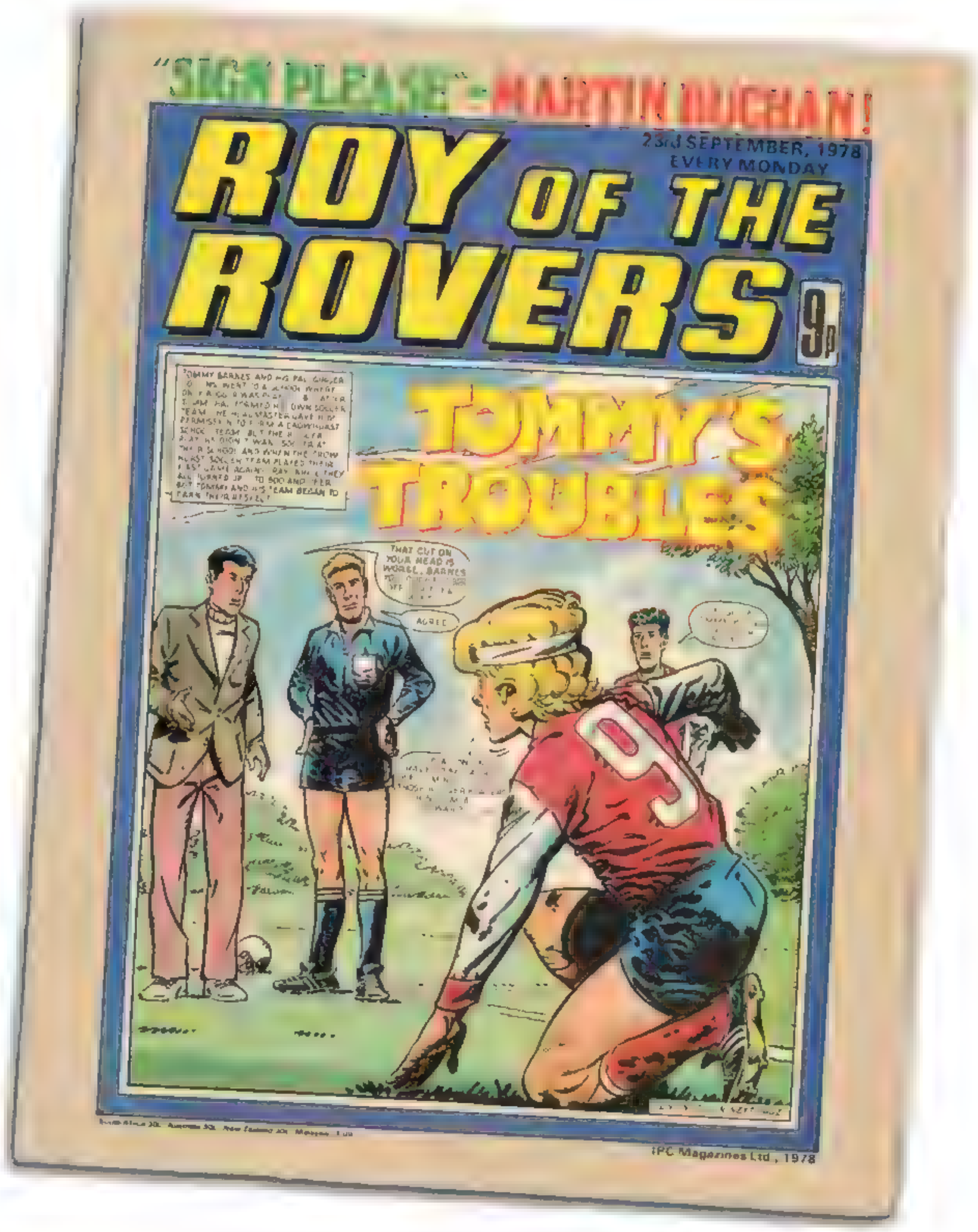
The publisher could even restrict the right of its in-house staff to make such an application, and could likewise restrict its freelance artists and writers, by simply including a clause to that effect in their contracts. But, again, in practice this was never done.

There is no copyright protection for a mere name. An idea, which is all a fictional character is, can have no copyright, as there is no copyright in an idea. Copyright can exist only in respect of a concrete piece of work, such as a page of comic art, which is why registering a trademark is necessary.

In point of fact, IPC obtained a trademark on only two comics-related characters, *Billy Bunter* and *Sexton Blake*: both of whom began life in the story papers published by one of IPC's forerunners, the *Amalgamated Press*.

Egmont has not obtained a trademark on any *IPC* comics character, but has trademarked the name 'Melchester Rovers' (presumably the expression 'Roy of the Rovers' was too broad). The only other comic-related trademarks it has are for characters from *Herge's Adventures of Tin Tin*, namely 'Captain Haddock', 'Thompson and Thompson', 'Professor Calculus' and 'Snowy' (i.e. the names of those characters in English).

Without a trademark, anyone can draw new strips based on the IPC characters of the sixties; because all that copyright gives you is the right to stop people reprinting existing strips.



'TOMMY BARNES' FROM ROY OF THE ROVERS (SEPTEMBER 1978)
ART BY JULIO SCIAFFINO

WHAT RIGHTS SURVIVE TODAY?

The publishers copyright in the typographical arrangement of each issue of a comic lasts for only 25 years, under both the 1956 and the 1988 Copyright Acts. So all issues published prior to 1984 are no longer protected by that type of copyright, which expired 25 years from the end of the year in which the comic appeared.

Accordingly, it is no breach of the publisher's copyright today to copy an entire issue, provided it's cover-dated 31 December 1983 or earlier.

What survives today is the artist's and writer's copyright (collectively called 'authors copyright'). In the case of comics published in the sixties, this type of copyright now lasts for the lifetime of the author and for 70 years thereafter, so will continue to be enforceable for many years to come.

There are, however, hurdles which *IPC* or *Egmont* might not get over, in terms of proving that authors copyright had ever been assigned to the publisher; and unless they can prove that a written assignment was made by the artist and the writer, then they cannot win in a Court.

In that event, the artist or writer (or, if deceased, their executors) could still sue, but may not know they have the right to.

New strips, of course, can always be published. *Janus Stark* has featured in one (in a manner of speaking) in recent years. This is not a breach of copyright, since it does not involve reprinting an old strip. And a new use of a character cannot be prevented, except by the trademark owner; but as the *IPC* characters have never had a trademark registered in respect of them, they have no such protection.●

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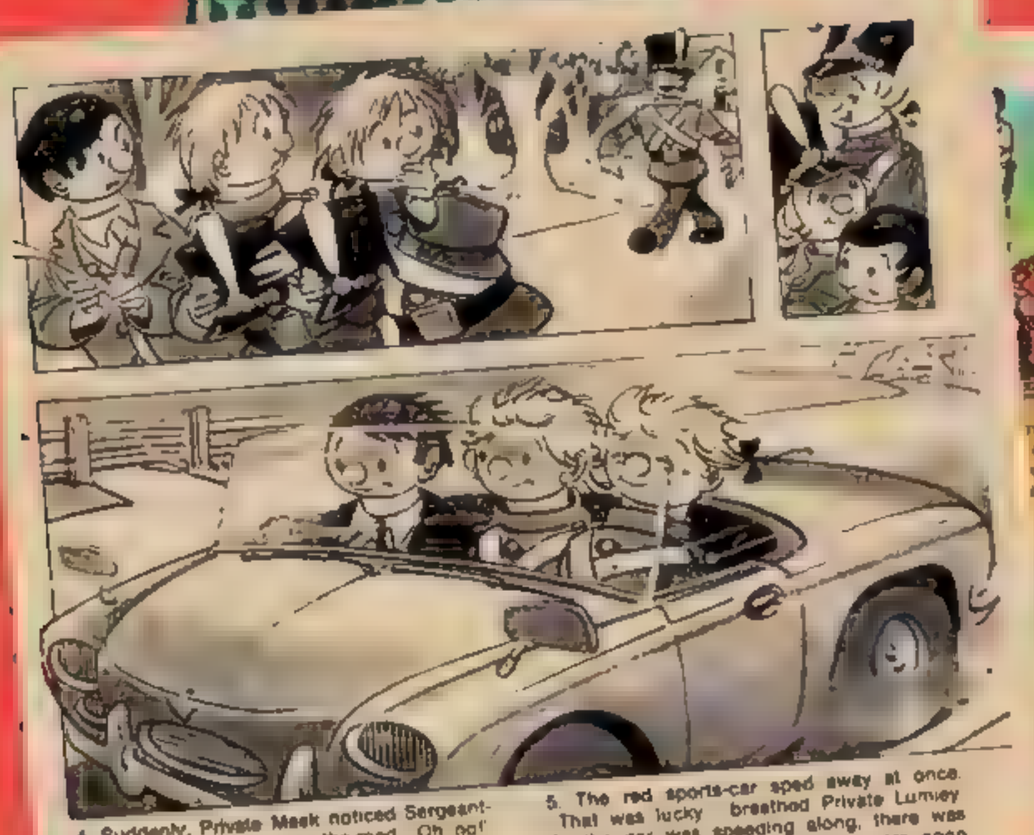
TIME TO GO HOME: AND READ...

PIPPIN in Playland



4. Suddenly, Private Meek noticed Sergeant-Major Grout coming along the road. "Oh no!" he exclaimed. "He'll take one look at our wet faces and hair and he'll think we have been swimming!" Mr Dagenham had an idea. "Quick!" he cried. "Jump into my car."

5. The red sports-car sped away at once. That was lucky, breathed Private Lumley. As the car was speeding along, there was a nice, blowy breeze. So they were soon dry. But Mr Dagenham's car needed another wash because the roads were very dusty!

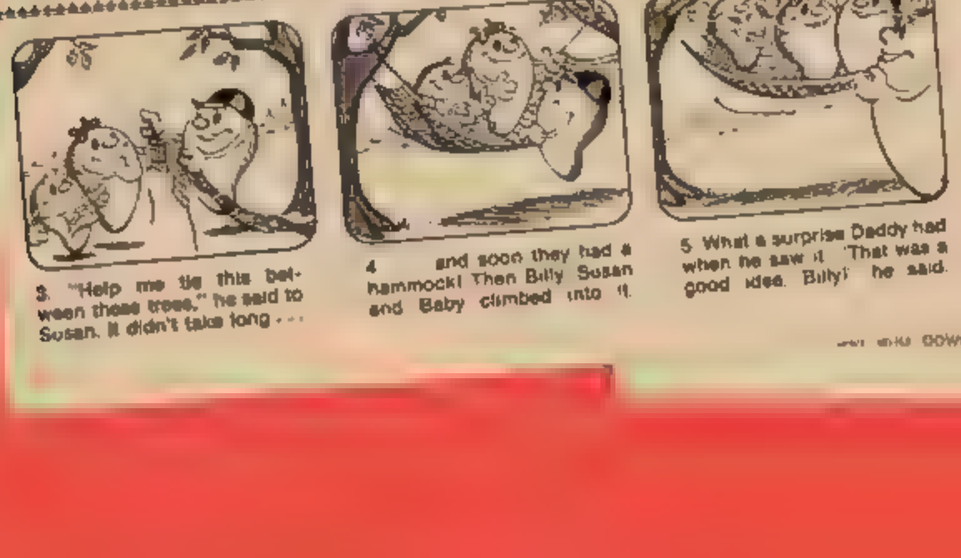
3. Oh, I think that can be arranged, I think ... said Bagpuss. He thought and there stood a perfect mouse-size motor mower on the floor of Emily's shop.

5. "Stop! Stop!" shouted Madeleine. "Car pets must not be mowed! Oh, Bagpuss! It is your fault. You should not think of such dangerous, harmful toys for the mice.

day. Privates Meek and -Major Grout if they could ning!" he roared. If you I suggest you go for a as Meek and Lumley

hot, and it did ear their thick g along, they ts flashy, red d afternoon, eek, breezily.

3. Mr Dagenham turned around with the hose still in his hand, and squirted water right into their faces! "Oh, dear! gasped Mr Dagenham, running up to them. "I really am very sorry indeed." The two soldier boys nodded their wet, dripping heads miserably.



3. "Help me tie this between these trees," he said to Susan. It didn't take long . . .

4. and soon they had a hammock! Then Billy Susan and Baby climbed into it.

5. What a surprise Daddy had when he saw it. "That was a good idea, Billy!" he said.

a roar, towards over the ...ver and down the middle!

Daddy was clearing out shed when he found dusty, old tennis-net.

2. "I don't want that," he said to Billy. So Billy took it into the back garden.

Robinson) and *Camberwick Green* (by Main's wife, Betty Larom), as time hopping *Mr. Benn*, appear in *TV Comic*), *Riverbank*, the *Herbs* (whose most popular character, Parsley the lion, also had a solo strip in *Moonbeans*, *The Weebles* (who, you may remember, wobble but they don't fall 1976-1979, possibly his last regular strip) and *Bagpuss* reprints of Alfred Bestall's *Rupert* strip also appeared, and from 1975 *Playland* (launched in 1968) merged turned up, too.

Some of these characters (and the TV shows many were based on) have been lost to the mists of time, others have years, outlasting even *TV* with the September 26 1986 1044 issues in total (in fact, *Pippin* didn't 'die' as such; rather, in keeping with tradition, it merged actually lasted into the 90s). And the secret of these titles' success? Well, it appears to all fun tales designed to stimulate the minds and strips in *Pippin and Playland* are sometimes crude and basic, sometimes (indeed more often) surprisingly monsters, and the fact that sadly, we won't see their like again. ●

Sooty and Sweep
1 One day Sweep found Sooty skipping
Why are you skipping? asked Sweep
trying to keep fit of course said Sooty
2 If you want to keep fit
thing that is more amusing
the said Sweep At
3 Sooty had soon torn up lots of news
papers into little pieces I lay the fire
because I can run faster boasted Sweep
4 Not very long after Sweep ran
nearby park leaving a trail of paper
5 "Sooty will never catch me" thought
Sweep Just then he met the park keeper,
who put up his hand and yelled "Stop!"
6 Pick up all that litter you've dropped
he frowned Sweep stopped as Sooty ran
past laughing

(RIGHT): SOOTY & SWEEP ART BY NEVILLE MAIN
(BELOW & TOP): BARNABY ART BY JENNY REYN

THE WEIRD WORLD OF WHOOPEE!

BY TONY INGRAM

In the 1970s, two companies were the joint kings of British humour comics, but they aimed at slightly different audiences. DC Thomson, publishers of those reliable old warhorses *The Dandy* and *The Beano*, seemed to deliberately target a certain type of upper-middle class kid (their stories, both in the humour strips and even more in the boy's adventure and girl's comics, tended to be very keen on public school hi-jinks and stereotyped dirty cockney urchins). But IPC/Fleetway aimed at the rest of us-the 'normal' kids, whose exposure to boarding schools and ponies was usually confined to reading Anthony Buckeridge or Enid Blyon books and watching the saccharine sweet adventures of *Black Beauty* on TV. These comics were often inspired, usually anarchic, sometimes a little strange but always fun-and one of the best of the bunch for a long time was *Whoopee!*

A comparatively late addition to IPC's stable, *Whoopee!* Would nonetheless become the last member of a long running triumvirate of humour comics which dominated the kids humour market throughout the 70's, the others of course being *Buster* and *Whizzer & Chips*. *Buster*, originally a more adventure based title, had been around since 1960 while *Whizzer & Chips* (effectively two comics in one, the Whizz kids forever engaged in friendly rivalry with the Chip-ites) had followed in 1969. *Whoopee!*, the baby of the bunch, didn't show its dirt

smudged face until 9 March 1974, but when it did the sheer imagination of many of the strips made it well worth the wait. Admittedly, a few in those early issues were rather more pedestrian-kid photographer Snap Happy, boxing kangaroo Clobber, Striker the ship's cat (who story and art wise looked as though he'd have been more at home in *TV Comic*, for some reason), the rather derivative Wolf Pack (*Whoopee!*'s answer to *The Beano's* '3 Bears') and the pointless Ad Lad never made much of an impression. Others, while good, were not far removed from a number of other, better known strips: the continual conflicts of the Upper Crusts and the Lazy Loafers (a pompous, countrified family and the pair of tramps who always outwitted them) are basically just *Dandy*'s Jocks & the Geordie's or, perhaps more obviously, The Toffs & the Toughs playing at the wrong speed, and Lunchin' Vulture (a pun which would probably bypass anyone not around in the 70's) was basically the same as any number of other wily comic strip animals out for a free lunch. But there were some genuinely imaginative ones, too.

One of the longest running *Whoopee!* strips was Scared Stiff Sam, the story of a lovable lunkhead who was terrified of his own shadow (and who owned a similarly nervous dog, the inappropriately named 'Fury'). Sam was one of the original line-up in the title and was still around in 1980, though he was later squeezed out in favour of newer strips. I like to imagine he's still hiding in a cupboard at the IPC offices.

Spy School, a kind of junior 'Man from UNCLE' set-up, was in the early issues too, as was Hee Gee and his nag, the story of a henpecked horse (!) locked in a constant war of words with his shrewish wife (I said this comic was a bit odd at times). Better remembered though, are the wonderful Bumpkin Billionaires, a family of stereotypical hicks loosely based on TV's 'The Beverley Hillbillies' who were forever trying (and failing) to rid >

themselves of their unwanted fortune (which caused them nothing but stress) and being thwarted by the efforts of their bank manager, who wanted them to keep it all (haven't times changed). Like Scared Stiff Sam and the ultra materialistic Toy Boy, the Bumpkins were pretty much a regular fixture throughout *Whoopee!*'s run, but others came and went over time as Whoopee! took in the stars of other, less successful comics through a number of mergers.

Daisy Jones's Locket, which ran for some years, was the story of a girl whose locket contained an obliging Arabian Nights style genie, forever causing mischief while trying to grant her simple wishes. Daisy, of course, is a part of that curious subset of British humour strips concerning kids in possession of amazing and improbable artefacts. And like Ginger's Super Jeep in the *Dandy* and Odd Ball and Minnie's Mixer in *Whizzer & Chips*, no-one ever seemed to question where the kids had gotten these objects or try to take them away from them. Nowadays of course, even the most innocent kids' title wouldn't be so naïve and Daisy's floating friend would doubtless be locked up as a suspected Islamic terrorist as soon as he showed his face in Whoopeetown (Daisy herself would probably end up in Holloway for harbouring him...).

The early issues were further brightened up by Mum's the Word, Little Miss Muffit (an accident prone schoolgirl, hence 'muff it': *Whoopee!* seemed to specialise in punning names), the idiotic Goon Platoon, Ernie Learner (who learnt a new trade every week), the always napping Pop Snorer, Kid Cartoonist, the *Whoopee!* holiday guide (fronted by a badly drawn character called simply 'the Guide'), King Arthur and his Frights of the Round Table (the King's pet monsters), schoolboys Clever Dick & Dozy Mick, and even an adventure serial, the beautifully executed Lone Ranger (then being repeated on TV). The perpetually panicked Willy Worry ('yes, he will'), the imaginative Trevor's Treasure Tracker (a metal detector; we were easily pleased back then) and various "star guests" from different IPC titles (presumably inventory stories to fill space or an attempt at boosting the other title's circulation) showed up later in 1974, and the title further established its unique identity with a letters/joke page ("ooh, it's Ossie") and even a table of contents on page 2. But it was in 1975, after its first merger-with the short lived title *Shiver & Shake* (named for its two main stars. Shiver was, predictably, a ghost; Shake, less predictably, an elephant!) - that *Whoopee!* really took off, and gained some of the characters who would become its mainstays. The dim-witted Blunderpuss (a cat protected by guardian angels) was nothing much to write home about, and half page single gag strip Shake had little or no thought put into it, but Lolly Pop-about a fantastically rich but miserly businessman and his long suffering son-was a readers favourite which lasted until 1983 or '84, a testament to the popularity of two British comics traditions: the rich but horrible and ill-fated character against the poor but virtuous and lucky one, and the 'parent as enemy' strip, in this case combined into one. No matter what Pop tried to do to sideline or frustrate poor, broke Archie, the kid always came out on top!

PRESENTING THE BEST OF 2 GREAT COMICS
EVERY MONDAY
12th OCTOBER. 1974
WHOOPEE!
and SHIVER & SHAKE
5p
INSIDE:
FREE COMPETITION
STRIKE IT RICH ! £25 SPENDING SPREES TO BE WON ! (And other super prizes too!)
GOLD
GOLD
GOLD
GOLD
FRANKIE STEIN'S MINI MONSTER COMIC
SHIVER SECTION-
plus ALL YOUR FAVOURITE FUN FEATURES
© IPC Magazines Ltd 1974
Australia 20c, New Zealand 20c, South Africa 20c, Rhodesia 22c, Malaysia 70c, Malta 6c

The real highlights of *Whoopee!* for many readers though, both before and even more so after the merger with *Shiver & Shake*,

were the comedic horror strips- something of an IPC tradition and one which this comic seemed to specialise in! IPC's creators had always tended to like this particular sub genre, hence the creation of *Shiver & Shake* and later, *Monster Fun* (which ended up merging with Buster) and thanks to the talent of people like Ken Reid (creator of the ever popular Frankie Stein, Martha's Monster Make-up, Tom Horror's World and Faceache, among others), the readers did, too. *Whoopee!* had had its own ghouls and ghosts since the beginning, when the quite superbly drawn The Ghost Train and the worrying Evil Eye (a ghostly, ghastly floating eyeball which hypnotised people into committing evil acts, a quite disturbing concept really) were part of the opening line-up. Evil Eye would cast its baleful gaze over the readers for years before finally closing around early 1980 when another merger squeezed it out, but Brian Walker's The ghost train would be quickly replaced by another Walker strip, the equally conceptually brilliant Scream Inn, about a haunted hotel which offered guests a million pounds if they could stay for a whole night (nobody ever managed it!). Other horror themed efforts included the aforementioned Frankie Stein, a former *Shiver & Shake* mainstay (the loveable monster and his scheming 'Dad', Professor Cube, would be a fixture from 1975 onwards), 'Orrible Hole (a floating black hole which was effectively the good counterpart of Evil eye), RT Nixon's 'Fun Fear' (a fair run by horrors), Creepy Car (a ghostly jalopy with a mind of its own), Ghoul Getters (a kind of prototype *Ghostbusters* strip, long before we knew who to call) and, memorably, Ken Reid's full page pin-ups on the back cover, 'Wanted Posters' and the later and far more long lived 'World Wide Weirdies'. The master of unusual creations, Reid's work livened up all IPC's humour titles for many years, and Wanted Posters was commissioned following the success of the similar 'Creepy Creations' in Shiver & Shake. These back page oddities are one of the things everyone remembers about *Whoopee!* and justly so.

In 1976, the mag got a new logo and cover layout, and several new strips to go with them. These included Werewilf (a schoolboy werewolf), Gook the TV spook (a kind of follow up to *Shiver*, though this ghost was obsessed with the telly) and the inane Smiler, but by this time the real star of Whoopee! was indisputably Sweeny Toddler, the uncontrollable baby originally brought to life by Leo Baxendale in *Shiver & Shake* #1 in 1973. By the time Sweeny and his dog Henry transferred over to *Whoopee!*, Tom Paterson was drawing the strip, and his unique style made the character instantly recognisable for some years before eventually giving way to Keith Reynolds (though by this time, the strip was running in *Whizzer & Chips*). Sweeny outlived *Whoopee!* in the end, too, living on in first *Whizzer & Chips* and then Buster, and has the distinction of having been seen in the last strip printed on the last page of *Buster*'s last issue in January 2000- effectively seeing off the entire IPC humour line! His adventures were written for many years by Graham Exton, and the terrible toddler would be the cover star of *Whoopee!* for two lengthy stints, such was his popularity. Sweeny may have been an example of the worst in humanity, but he always seemed to bring out the best in his creators...

1977 brought the less than memorable *Thumpty Dumpty*, the nostalgia obsessed fathers of Dads as Lads, Dicky Howett's anarchic Supermum (this headscarf wearing Superheroine can be seen as a kind of tryout for the many similar characters Howett later created for *Marvel UK*, including super idiot Jet Lagg), two panel gag strip 'Knock Knock' and the rather unusual Kids Court (a strip seemingly inspired by then popular TV show *Crown Court*), about a kiddie police force who arrested adults seen to be being horrible to kids and took them to be sentenced by a kid judge. Almost invariably, this spectacularly silly piece of wish fulfilment ended with the judge, court officials, and that weeks victim of adult oppression getting a slap-up feed at the seething defendant's expense.

The Spectacular Adventures of Willie Bunk were drawn in a more realistic style than most of the strips (*Whoopee!* usually had one adventure strip running, somewhere) but was essentially no different than the many

other kid-with-magical-gimmick strips. It was still fun, though. The intro read "Willie Bunk had been given a spare pair of glasses which could completely change his view of events for a short time". These baffling bins inevitably led to Willie performing amazingly heroic feats such as beating up several school bullies while deluding himself that he was an Indian chief (as you do). Curiously, he never seemed to end up out of his depth even though the spooky specs did not appear to grant him any special abilities in himself. It's tempting to wonder what some of the writers of these strips had been given to 'change their view', because many of them were clearly on something, given their unlikely flights of fancy!

Conniving domestic Maid Marian (her name was Marian and she worked as a maid) was another late 70's addition, as were The Spooktacular 7 (Brian Walker's follow-up to Scream Inn, with all the same characters now running an agency reminiscent of TV's then current *Rentaghost*). Others included Claws (the adventures of a crafty cat; later, he developed an ongoing rivalry with a crow and the strip became Claws VS Caws), Bookworm (a kid who spent all his time reading. What a fascinating premise for a strip!), the tale telling Blabbermouth, Ivor Swap, and J Metcalfe's wonderfully witty Sheerluck & Son, an underappreciated gem about a dumb detective and his smarter kid.

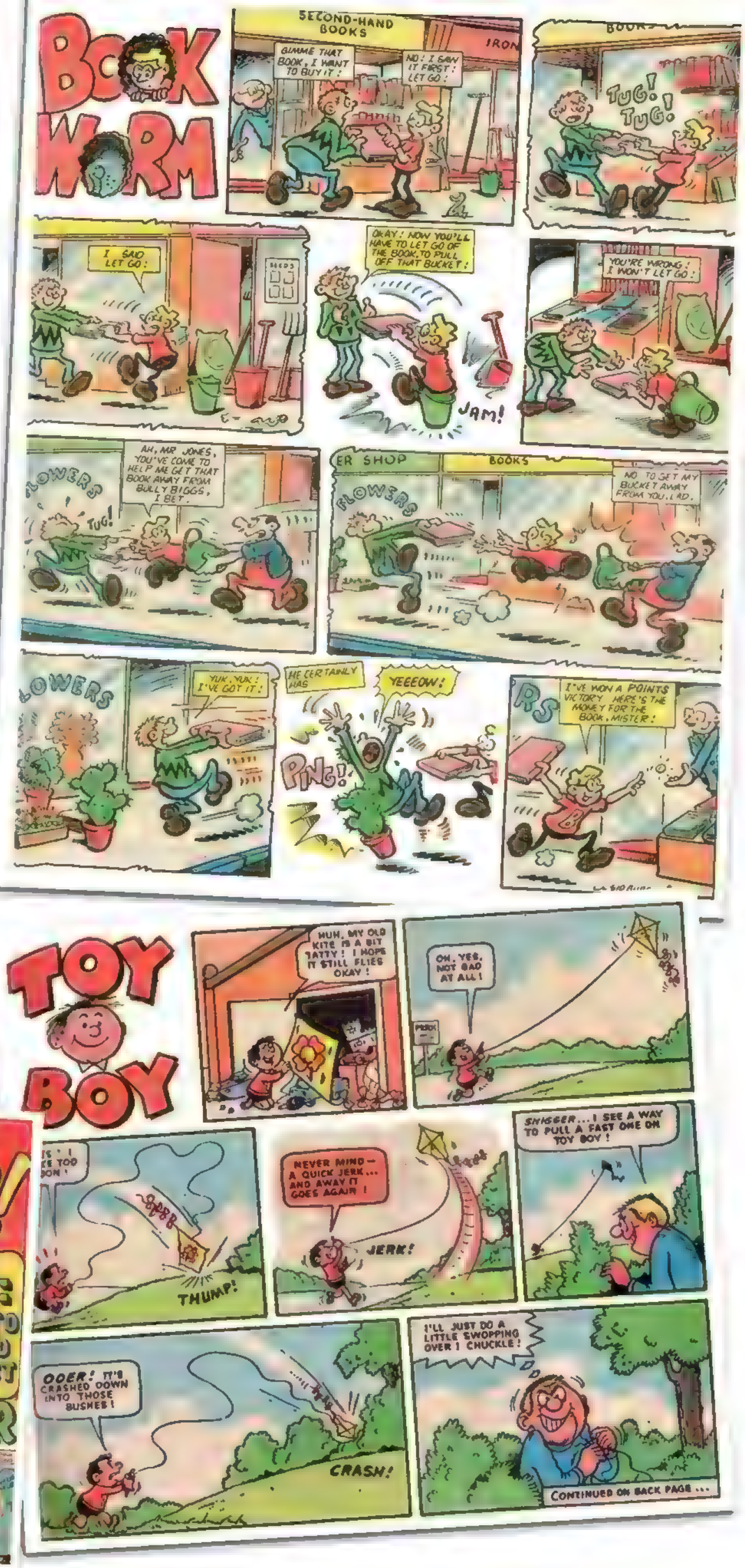
Whoopee!'s next big change came in 1980, when the title absorbed yet another comic, 'Cheeky'. Cheeky himself, the comic's star, had started life as a member of the Krazy Gang in the 1976-78 title *Krazy Comic*, but had been awarded his own comic in October 1977, Frank McDiarmid chronicling the buck toothed kid's meandering adventures as he wandered through his home town swapping appalling jokes with a cast of characters which included the incontinent Walter Wurx (where would Britain be without lavatorial humour, even in a comic aimed at ten year olds), accident prone Bump-Bump Bernie and the surreal Knock-Knock Door, as well as the quite staggeringly pneumatic crossing lady Lily Pop, the object of Cheeky's affections. The merger with *Cheeky* resulted in a sizable chunk of the page count being given over to what amounted to a mini *Cheeky* comic in the centre, which resulted in several older strips being squeezed out. Their replacements were sometimes worth it, though, in particular the wonderful Mustapha Mi££ion (an oil rich Arab kid being taught to value the simple things in life by his British pals...who nonetheless look like public school boys anyway. Oh, well...), Calculator Kid (whose calculator was a talking mini supercomputer vaguely reminiscent of KITT in the TV show *Knight Rider*, but without the wheels) and the $6,000,000 Gran (if you remember Steve Austin and Jaime Somers, you don't need an explanation for that one!). Less memorable, perhaps, were Chip, Paddywack (another toothy idiot) and Stage School. Oddly, those squeezed out included the ever popular Evil Eye and Brian Walker's ever versatile ghouls, while the rather pointless Blabbermouth and Smiler were retained. Perhaps comedy horror was considered to have gone out of style or was in some way no longer acceptable to IPC? A shame, really...

DAISY JONES' LOCKET
COR! I'VE FOUND A HORSE SHOE!
WOW! THAT'S LUCKY BASHER!
ONLY IF YOU THROW IT OVER YOUR SHOULDER BACKWARDS
HEY! LOOK OUT!
BASHER TAKE THAT DANGEROUS WITH IT
I'LL GIVE IT BACK
I'LL BASH YOU FOR THAT
WOW! NO IT'S NOT, IS IT?
I'M AFTER YOUR LOCKET INSTEAD
YERK!
HAW HAW! THE GENIE HAS TO OBEY ME NOW I'VE GOT THE LOCKET
SORRY BASHER I'M AFRAID HE'S RIGHT
KAZAM!
WOW! HE'S CHANGED THE HORSE SHOE INTO A GIANT MAGNET!
OH NO!
NO NO! HE'S GOT BACK LOCKET
SEE HER GOOD EYE GONE MY LOCKET SEEMS TO HAVE LOST ITS ATTRACTION FOR THAT BULL
GAH!

By 1981, *Whoopee!*'s glory days seemed past and the comic in something of a decline. *Cheeky* had been a valuable addition, but the loss of old stalwarts like Evil Eye and even newer ones such as Sheerluck & Son was keenly felt by some readers, and many of their replacements (like Chip, the prehistoric Cavers and kid hypnotist Blinkety Blink; no prizes for guessing what inspired that last title) were bland by comparison. Of the classic line-up only the ever resilient Sweeny, Frankie Stein, Lolly Pop, Toy Boy and the Bumpkins were still around-even Scared Stiff Sam had finally fled the comics pages for good. The Cheeky contingent, now pretty much fully integrated, were better than some of the newer strips, but in July 1983 yet another merger took place, this time with short lived title 'Wow!', and the new comic more or less dominated. Cheeky was gone soon after (though Mustapha Mi££ion remained). In place of the older

favourites came the bizarre Snack Man (based on computer craze Pac Man, of course; this oddity actually ousted Sweeny Toddler from the cover for a time!), the odd Family Trees (about mobile trees on the run from a lumberjack!), Shipwreck School (a class and their teacher stuck on a desert island), KBR ('Kid's Band Radio', intended to capitalise on the already fading CB radio craze), Boy Boss, Animalad, Ossie, Gran's Gang (that one wasn't bad, in fact-it's always fun to see pensioners behaving like juvenile delinquents), Spare Part Kit (a story about a boy with slip-on artificial muscles, starring the cringe inducing named Kit Katz), football strip Teammates, the deeply unfunny comedian Kid Comic (no, he wasn't supposed to be unfunny; he just was) and the actually not half bad *Creepy Comix* - a nostalgic throwback to the old days about a kid whose horror comics came to life when he needed them to. With the exception of *Creepy Comix*, most of them couldn't hold a candle to their predecessors, which was hardly surprising given that Wow! had been a failure, lasting less than a year. Why IPC decided that characters nobody had liked much in their own title should take over a moderately successful one and oust its own moderately successful cast is a mystery, but the results were all too predictable. In March 1985 Whoopee! bit the dust, its best strips being shoehorned into *Whizzer & Chips* (which in turned was absorbed by *Buster* in October 1990).

The golden era of the IPC humour triumvirate was over, but it would leave *Whoopee*'s loyal readers a lifetime of golden memories. ●


BOOK WORM
SECOND-HAND BOOKS
GIMME THAT BOOK, I WANT TO BUY IT!
NO! I SAW IT FIRST! LET GO!
TUG! TUG!
I SAID LET GO!
OKAY! NOW YOU'LL HAVE TO LET GO OF THE BOOK, TO PULL OFF THAT BUCKET!
JAM!
YOU'RE WRONG! I WON'T LET GO!
AH, MR JONES, YOU'VE COME TO HELP ME GET THAT BOOK AWAY FROM BULLY BIGGS, I BET.
TUG!
FLOWERS
BOOKS
NO TO GET MY BUCKET AWAY FROM YOU, LAD.
YUK, YUK! I'VE GOT IT!
HE CERTAINLY HAS
YEEEOW!
PING!
I'VE WON A POINTS VICTORY HERE'S THE MONEY FOR THE BOOK, MISTER!
TOY BOY
HUH, MY OLD KITE IS A BIT TATTY! I HOPE IT STILL FLIES OKAY!
OH, YES, NOT BAD AT ALL!
SNIGGER... I SEE A WAY TO PULL A FAST ONE ON TOY BOY!
NEVER MIND — A QUICK JERK... AND AWAY IT GOES AGAIN!
JERK!
SPRR
THUMP!
OOER! IT'S CRASHED DOWN INTO THOSE BUSHES!
CRASH!
I'LL JUST DO A LITTLE SWOPPING OVER! CHUCKLE!
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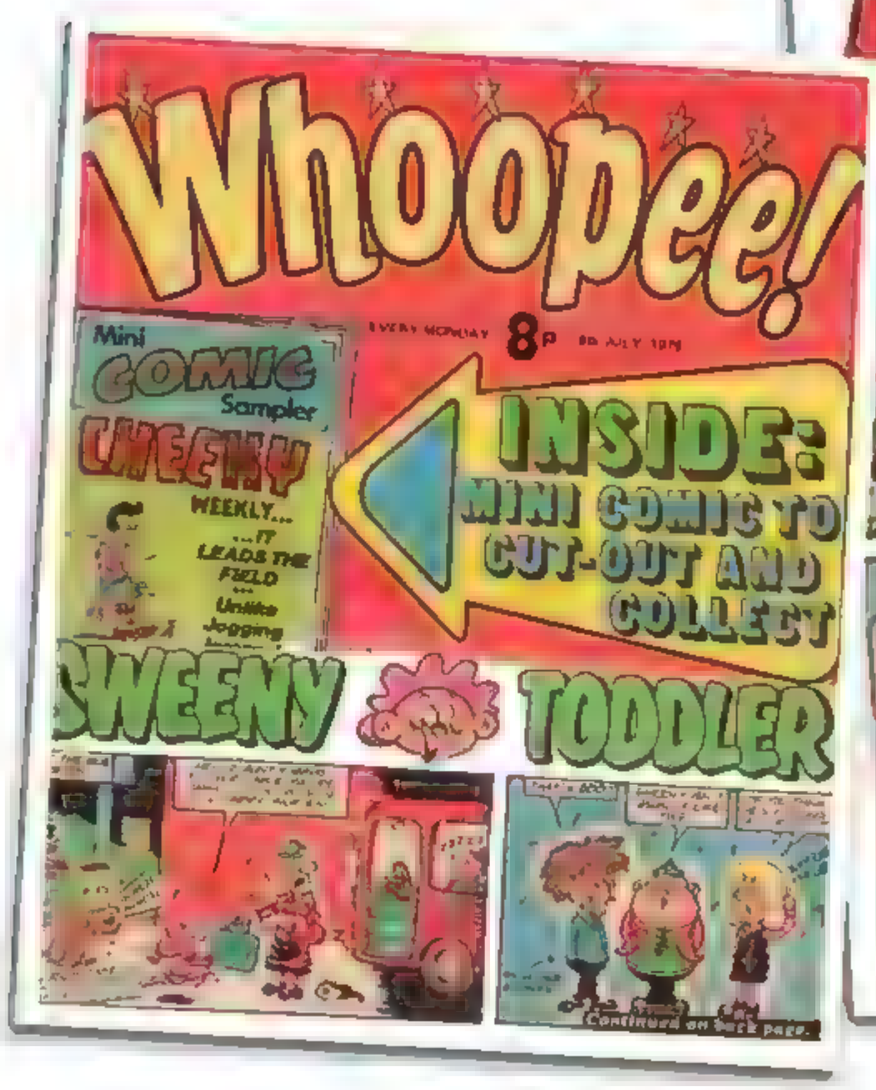

On Saturday 14 February 1975, 'Action', a weekly adventure comic for boys, was launched by IPC Magazines. The man mainly responsible for the comics conception was Pat Mills, one of the most creative and prolific writers in comics then and now. Pat's aim was to expand the boundaries of British comics to reflect the perceived growing maturity of the average older child reader. **Colin Wyatt** *gives us his unique insight of...*

ACTION

A CONTROVERSIAL COMIC!

For eighteen years, since 1957, I had worked as an art assistant on the young children's comics division in London, at what had then been The Amalgamated Press, and was now IPC Magazines. In 1975 this division, known as the 'nursery group' was being dismantled and the staff moved to other publications. So, as issue five of 'Action' was hitting the bookstalls, I found myself joining the staff of this revolutionary but soon to be controversial comic.

From 'Jack and Jill' and 'Playhouse' to 'Action'! It took a considerable re-adjustment on my part. But one I never regretted.

From the very first issue 'Action' began pushing the boundaries the way Pat had envisioned. For some however this was considered a retrograde step in children's publishing. Gone were the stories featuring schoolboy heroes like Dan Dare or Roy Of The Rovers, and in came tougher, more ruthless characters and harder hitting stories like 'Hell's Highway', 'Death Game 1999' and 'Hook Jaw' etc. And the readers loved it! Letters of praise flooded the editorial office.

There was, of course, the occasional dissenting voice. A parent or school teacher would write to say what a corrupting influence the comic was having on its' readers. But these were in the minority. If the readers wanted more violence in 'Death Game 1999' or more blood in 'Hook Jaw', then why not give it to them! Which reminds me of an incident that occurred during those early days. Soon after 'Action''s launch in 1975, IPC Magazines moved from their Farringdon Street offices to the newly built Kings Reach Tower in Stamford Street. There, apart from managerial offices, the staff worked in open plan areas separated by five feet high partitions. At this time I was responsible for some of the colouring in Action', including 'Hook Jaw' in the centre pages. 'Hook Jaw' was a shark and was inspired by the then recent Steven Spielberg film 'Jaws'. In each issue at least one human, and usually many more, would be eaten or gored by 'Hook Jaw', so named because of the broken harpoon

protruding from his lower jaw. I was so busy colouring one day that I was unaware that John Sanders, our Editorial Director, was peering over the partition. "That's it!" he suddenly said. "That's what we want. More blood!" I mention this because of events that followed which I'll refer to later.

'Action' was giving the readers what they wanted. The circulation was increasing, and therefore the comic was making a profit for the company. So everyone was happy. However, the comic was also making waves, and its' reputation was growing for all the wrong reasons. Soon the dissenting voices became a shout. The 'Daily Mail' and 'Sun' newspapers both featured articles condemning the worst elements in the comic. Particularly the goriness of 'Hook Jaw' and apparent glorification of hooliganism in the football story 'Look Out For Lefty'. Apparently the problem was even raised in Parliament!

'Action''s notoriety was growing. 'Nationwide' was a news and current affairs programme broadcast each weekday live by the BBC. They sent a reporter to interview John Sanders about this growing notoriety. John Sanders took a gamble by opening a sackful of reader's mail and reading out a couple of letters at random to prove the comic's popularity. The gamble paid off. The letters were full of praise.

But the management was obviously aware of how close to the wind they were sailing. The 'Action' staff, which included new editor John Smith, sub-editor Milton Finesilver, and art assistants Roy Humphries, Tony Jozwiak and myself, were summoned to John Sander's office. Already there, was Group Managing Editor Jack Le Grand, and also I think, Pat Mills, who was still responsible for a lot of the scripting for the comic. John Sanders explained in no uncertain terms that the content had to be toned down. At this time I was doing a lot of freelance Disney artwork for IPC's Disney publications, and John, who knew about this, said "Tut! Tut! Colin. I'm surprised at you!" as if I was personally responsible. He was no doubt being flippant, because he would have known that as an art assistant I would have had no control over the content of the comic. Also, he had conveniently forgotten his "That's what we want! More blood!" comment referred to earlier.

From this point on, 'Action' was to be monitored to ensure that it would no longer court controversy. To do this monitoring the management insisted on seeing the artwork before the comic went to press. Before the print run was begun a few advance copies would be run off for checking editorially, and these were being scrutinized by the management. Eventually however, management made the decision instead to just see these advance copies, which

HOOK JAW
WIGFORD
OHHHH! THAT WAS ALMOST NUMBER THREE! LAMPTON'S BOMBARDING THEIR GOAL LINE A SIXTEEN INCH GUN!
WITHOUT THEIR THUGS TO HOWL 'EM ON, NOTTER-FIELD MAYE GONE TO PIECES!
IT'S SHEER SUICIDE NOT TO READ...
ACTION
EVERY SATURDAY
23rd OCTOBER 1976
7p
Witness
Swop in
DEATH GAME 1999
COMMIT SUICIDE...
Swim in the sea with HOOK JAW!
Try to double-cross DREDGER!
Drive a truck in HELL'S HIGHWAY!

was obviously after the artwork and copy had already been sent to the printers.

Working on the comic on a day to day basis it soon became apparent that slowly, almost imperceptibly, the comic was returning to its harder hitting content, and once more giving the readers what they wanted. Things were beginning to slip through unnoticed. Unnoticed that is until the advance copy of issue dated 23 October 1976 was seen by the management. Their axe fell swiftly and decisively, and at midday on October 6th they announced their decision to suspend publication of 'Action' for the purpose, as they put it, "of re-appraising editorial policy". This was despite me being asked by the editor to letter a large 'BA-ROOM!' over the shattered figure of a participant in a page of 'Death Game 1999'. Obviously there was still enough in the comic to concern the management. The print run for the October 23rd issue was never begun, and therefore the few advance copies of the banned issue were the only ones ever printed. The collector in me made me keep several of those advance copies. One of these I gave to Martin Barker when he was researching his book 'Action: The story of a violent comic', and I gave another to my friend, the late author and collector Denis Gifford, to add to his vast collection.

Everything now had to be heavily censored. Every script received from the writers and those already sent out to the artists, plus any artwork already in, all had to be scrutinized and then altered, and some of it discarded completely. As an art assistant I was responsible for making many of these alterations to the artwork, and I was told to simply scrap the unusable panels. However, as this seemed a shame, I kept some of the artwork instead of throwing it away, and I still have in my position a few panels from 'Look Out For Lefty'.

'Action' was out of circulation for six weeks, and resumed publication on December 4th. The changes to the content were considerable. 'Kids Rule Okay' was out. 'Hook Jaw' was still there but in black and white only. So no more blood! 'Death Game 1999' was back but now re-named 'Spinball'. And no more shattered figures!

It was soon obvious that the readers weren't happy with the changes. Their letters made it more than evident. Almost unanimously it was "Bring back the violence, the blood, etc., or we stop buying the comic!" Of course that was never going to happen, and almost inevitably many readers were true to their threats .

'Action' became just another boys adventure comic, no worse and no better than other similar titles on the market, and its circulation began to drop significantly.

Soon after this time, a marketing venture was launched in six of IPC's juvenile publications. Called 'The Big Six' it was a collecting scheme where a board type game was printed in the pages of the comics involved, over a period of four weeks. This, of course, was to entice new readers with the hope that many would be retained after the scheme had ended. Pat Mills and another great comic writer, John Wagner, devised an Olympic race game for 'Valiant' comic which I illustrated. Also, I devised and illustrated 'Hook Jaw's Gold!' for 'Action'. It was hoped that these collecting games would help increase the circulations of the comics involved. If they did, it was probably only temporary.

Because of the influences of television and the proliferation of boys adventure titles, inevitably many circulations were falling. 'Action''s was obviously among these, and only two years after the infamous withdrawn issue, the comic finally ceased publication.

Because of what 'Action' had once represented, I'm sure there were those happy to see its' demise. It is undoubtedly true that at times 'Action' went too far. However, I think it's equally true that little credit was given to the fact that most children were quite capable of distinguishing between fantasy and reality. I'm sure Pat Mills was aware of that. Perhaps he and 'Action' were just ahead of their time!

THE AMAZING MISTER KUIPER

A GRAPHIC NOVEL

COMING SOON...

Fiction is littered with scores of villains. They are a necessary part of what makes effective stories. Heroes need an opposing force to fight and struggle against. We see this in all types of narrative media, and comics are no exception. In comics the types of villains are varied: super-villains abound in mainstream American comics, while in British humour comics every hero has their nemesis–for the Bash Street Kids *there is* Teacher, *and for* Dennis the Menace *there is* Walter *the* Softy. *Andrew Edwards talks to us about arguably the greatest villain of them all...*

Comics also make use of real life villains in their fictional universe, and no villain occupies as significant a place in comics all across the world as Adolf Hitler. UK comics are no exception to this. While political cartoons satirising the German leader appeared in British newspapers during the war years, the earliest appearances in comics date to early issues of The Dandy and The Beano produced during WWII. Paper was rationed and so publication moved from weekly to fortnightly, with each title being published on alternate weeks. Patriotism abounded in these publications and every effort was made to boost public morale. In the comics, depictions of Hitler, the Nazis and Mussolini showed them as pathetic, laughable buffoons easily dealt with by characters like Desperate Dan. Dan and Lord Snooty in particular seemed to defeat Hitler on a regular basis. Even Korky the Cat was not averse to building a Hitler snowman on the cover of The Dandy.

Hitler even had his own strip in The Dandy. As bizarre as this seems in hindsight, 'Addie and Hermy the Nasty Nazis' was a regular feature. Hitler and Hermann Goering were cast as idiots who spoke in a mangled, pseudo-Germanic way, using "der" for "there" for instance. The Beano also joined in the fun by featuring 'Musso the Wop ('He's a-big-a-da-flop')'. These comics did not go unnoticed

Hitler

in British Comics

I WAS Adolf's DOUBLE
CRUMP!
CRUMP!
GRAB HIM!
HELP! I DEMAND TO SEE MY LAWYER, MY MUM WOULD DO!
CUT THE GABBLE FRITZ! I'VE LL TEACH YOU TO BARGE IN PAROPHRASE!
AT THAT MOMENT ON THE
DONNER UND BLUSTERS!!

* This did not stop John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra from depicting Hitler as a bemused, cowardly buffoon in the Strontium Dog serial 'The Schicklgruber Grab'in 2000AD in the early eighties, or prevent Tim Quinn and Dicky Howett from using Hitler as the basis for their cartoon humour strip 'I Was Adolf's Double' for Marvel UK around the same time.

† (www.bestofbattle.sevenpennynightmare.co.uk).

by the Nazis. The Gestapo created a 'hit list' of UK residents who they would arrest once they had invaded, and this list included both the Dandy and Beano editors and the artist Dudley D Watkins. This alone reveals the extent to which the Nazis were troubled by UK comic versions of their leader and his colleagues.

Other media also portrayed Hitler as the embodiment of buffoonery, none more so than Charlie Chaplin, another person on the Gestapo list, for his ground-breaking satirical film The Great Dictator in which he played an obvious Hitler type called Adenoid Hynkel. Both Chaplin and UK comics shared a burning desire to prick the pomposity and threat of the Nazis through comedy, but while The Great Dictator remains a classic, it's somehow more jarring to look back at these children's comics now, knowing what we do about the atrocities committed by Hitler and the Nazis. Some may even view them as tasteless, but I'd say that is a mistake. Historical context is everything, and making fun of an enemy during war time is a psychologically sound way of coping with the stresses and anxieties facing the UK at the time. However, following the end of the war, and the discovery of the true levels of horror inflicted by the Nazis, it would become bad taste to depict Hitler in a comic light. In the post war years Hitler has to be portrayed as a monster because being portrayed as a buffoon would be an insult to the millions who died as a result of the Nazis actions.*

Hitler as the ultimate villain becomes a key feature of scores of comics produced in Britain during the 1970s. Dramatic stories of British bravery and fighting spirit abounded in comics like Battle, Victor and Warlord. Some war stories are now critically acclaimed, like Charley's War and Darkie's Mob, and they are finally being reprinted in quality editions. But some are, sadly, almost forgotten. One neglected gem, Day of the Eagle, by Eric Hebden, with art by Pat Wright and Barrie Mitchell, is an interesting piece of work that appeared in Battle Picture Weekly between 8th March - 24th May 1975. Mike Nelson, codename Eagle, is assigned the task of assassinating Adolf Hitler. His ruthless drive is largely the result of the death of his father and brother at Dunkirk.

Early instalments have been reprinted in the recent Best of Battle book, while the whole series can be read online at the superb Captain Hurricane's Best of Battle website.†

Hedben was a veteran of the conflict and prided himself on producing stories with accuracy, something his son Alan continues to do so in the bi-weekly Commando digests for DC Thompson.

The death of War comics in the UK was soon followed by the death of variety in British comics. Scores of titles merged and died, leaving only the Dandy, Beano, 2000 AD and the Judge Dredd Megazine as the stalwarts of UK newsagent comics. One noble experiment was Crisis, Fleetway's attempt at producing a political adult comic. In issues 46-49 it printed a colourised version of a strip that had begun in Cut, a Scottish cultural arts magazine that had caused controversy. It was called The New Adventures of Hitler.

The title suggests an action-adventure series, but the series is nothing of the sort. It was written by Grant Morrison, with art by Steve Yeowell. Both had used Nazism in a previous work for 2000AD, the superhero series Zenith, but went for broke in their depiction of a pre-WW1 Hitler. Based on the conjecture that Hitler visited relatives in Liverpool during 1912-1913 it's a masterful, surreal strip which combines a search for

the Holy Grail with a wardrobe that contains, at various times, echoes of future cultural touchstones: Morrissey and John Lennon perform songs within it during the story.

It proved to be a controversial title, evoking conservative outrage and liberal scepticism in equal measure; The Sun was outraged, while musician and journalist Pat Kane also made his disgust evident, leading to a feud with Morrison over the strip. It remains uncollected, and this is a shame because it is a powerful piece of fiction, one which deserves more critical acclaim than it has received. Its irony is savage: through conversing with John Bull the reader realises that Hitler would find no bigger inspiration for his quest for power than in the example provided by British Imperialism. Yet such themes hit hard and don't play well with the UK media, and so it seems unlikely that a reprint will occur, at least in this country.

The relative death of comics in UK newsagents has led to a lack of appearances by Hitler in comics on this side of the Atlantic. Beyond a cameo appearance by his mother in *From Hell*, which I would class as an honorary British comic anyway due to its creators nationalities (Moore being English and Campbell an ex-pat Scotsman), little else seems to have surfaced. Hitler's comics alter ego seemed destined to remain mouldering away in the page of forgotten British comics, but at least he is frozen for posterity in online scans and commemorative print editions. He is the ultimate comics villain and, more importantly, the ultimate villain in history. The comics help us to remember this fact, and for that alone the actual comics deserve to be remembered and, whenever possible, archived for future generations of British readers. ●

MIRABILIS

YEAR of WONDERS

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Pat Mills looks back at the career of a comics genius...

THE MONTY PYTHON OF COMICS

KEN REID

Long before Monty Python, there was Ken Reid. His surreal cartoon strips, such as the original Frankie Stein, George's Germs, The Nervs, Jonah and Face Ache are often Pythonesque, sometimes even more insane, yet equally funny. And Ken's artistic style is comparable in detail and darkness to Ronald Searle's cartoons which I remember first enjoying as a kid in the otherwise dreary, middle class 'New Elizabethan' children's magazine. (Now that's a killer of a title. I bet teachers dreamed that one up). But perhaps because Ken's humour might be described as working class and he had no priveliged background in the Cambridge Footlights to propel his career, he is not given the status and recognition he rightly deserves. Worse, I know within his own lifetime he fell foul of the policy of making such maverick artists conform to the formulaic, safe emptiness which British IPC 'humour' comics–like *Whoopee!*, *Whizzer and Chips*, *Cor!* etc–largely consisted of in the 1970s , aside from the contributions by Ken and a few other superb creators like Leo Baxendale.

I say this with some authority because I wrote many of the lead strips for these comics for around four years before I could finally take no more and ran for the hills. Amongst the strips I wrote was Frankie Stein for Shiver and Shake - then drawn by Bob Nixon in a popular, accessible but simpler style. Gradually I became aware that Frankie had been created by Ken Reid and I looked up his old stories in the bound volumes of Odham's *Smash!* And *Wham!* (owned now by Times Warner, I think). They were genius! Sick, dark, hilarious and in the worst

possible taste. In one strip, for instance, Frankie Stein walks down the street with a live kitten in each boot to keep his feet warm. In others, he enters a lunatic asylum where there are other freaks who live in a Pythonesque world of total surrealism. And this was years before there was anything comparable on television. Then there was the Nervs , featuring the most revolting, flatulent and hysterical journeys inside a grotesque fat kid's body. When the comic was taken over by IPC, the Managing Editor dropped the strip because he thought it so disgusting. Humbled by such master works, and by a Golden Age I had missed, I asked the humour comics editor Bob Paynter why Ken didn't take back his old strip Frankie Stein. I would have happily stood down from writing it just to see this brilliant man continue his creation.

It was made clear to me that was preferred in the Fleetway 'fun' factory was a 'safe pair of hands'. Ken was too risky, too 'indulgent', (e.g. genuinely funny) too subversive. Bob told me how

Ken was constantly putting in vulgar details he felt were not suitable for kids, but–he assured me with great satisfaction–they were always spotted and whitened out. What a shame. It was claimed that readers actually preferred the formulaic and simple styles of other lesser artists , rather than detailed and grotesque imagery. There is an element of truth in this–it's the McDonald's factor: fast food instant gratification that sometimes briefly grabs kids, but it's not the entire truth and–in my experience–quality eventually outs over mindless formula strips. Looking at the Beano in recent years I notice it, too, has largely taken this simplistic approach rather than the classic, 'detailed' look of yesteryear. I have my doubts whether readers actually prefer the 'modern' look–after all, the IPC 'humour' comics eventually rightly went down the toilet because of such uninspired content. As James Delingpole recently wrote in the Daily Telegraph, he was cancelling his kids' subscription to the Beano because of its political correctness after Dennis the Menace was given a pc make-over. I suspect many parents and kids feel the same way.

Ken's other great works, such as his immortal *Jonah*,needs little introduction from me. Other than to pray that one day DC Thomson's will publish a complete collection of Jonah. They must surely be aware they are sitting on a treasure trove. And Jonah is as much a part of Britain's popular culture heritage as Just William or Billy Bunter. I also pray that a digital comic publisher–or a fan–will discover and

JONAH
FOR YEARS, A TANTALIZING PROBLEM HAS REMAINED UNSOLVED! HOW DID THE NATIVES OF POONGA-WHANGA, A REMOTE TROPICAL ISLAND, ORIGINALLY ARRIVE THERE SOME 2,000 YEARS AGO, THE NEAREST MAINLAND IS 5,000 MILES AWAY!
A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, ALEC B. FLOPP THINKS HE HAS FOUND THE ANSWER.
COCONUTS! THAT'S THE SOLUTION!
I AM CONVINCED THAT THE NATIVES ORIGINALLY SAILED FROM THE MAINLAND ON HUGE RAFTS CONSTRUCTED OF COCONUTS —ALL STRUNG TOGETHER WITH STRIPS OF RHINOCEROS HIDE!
ALEC B. FLOPP PUBLISHES HIS THEORY IN THE COLLEGE MAGAZINE, AND —
HAW-HAW! MY DEAH WATHBONE! HAVE YOU EVAH HEARD SUCH UTTAH WUBBISH! THE OLD BOY'S GONE COMPLETELY OFF HIS WOCKAH THIS TIME!
HAW-HAW!
BUT, ALEC B FLOPP IS UNDAUNTED—
HA-HA! HO-HO!
BAH! I'LL SHOW 'EM! I'LL BUILD A COCONUT RAFT AND ACCOMPLISH THE ACTUAL VOYAGE MYSELF, TO PROVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE! BUT I'LL NEED AN EXPERIENCED NAVIGATOR!
SO—A SMALL AD. APPEARS IN "THE NAUTICAL WEEKLY"
WANTED:- EXPERIENCED SEAMAN, TO ASSIST NAVIGATION ON 5,000-MILE VOYAGE!
The NAUTICAL WEEKLY
COD!
MY LUCK'S CHANGED AT LAST! THEY SAY THAT OPPORTUNITY ALWAYS KNOCKS ONCE ON EVERYBODY'S DOOR!
THE MISSION FOR [illegible] RULES
AND SO, HALF AN HOUR LATER, ON THE DOOR OF ALEC B. FLOPP'S FLAT, KNOCKS THE HAND OF DOOM—
RAT-TAT RAT-TAT!
THIS COULD BE A NAVIGATOR..
THEN PROF FLOPP MAKES THE BIGGEST MISTAKE OF HIS LIFE!— HE OPENS THE DOOR.
ONE ABLE AN' WILLIN' NAVIGATOR REPORTING FOR DUTY, SIR!
GOOD GRACIOUS!
OH, WELL! I SUPPOSE ONE SHOULDN'T JUDGE BY APPEARANCES ALONE!—ANYWAY, HE'S THE ONLY REPLY I'VE HAD TO MY AD. SO HE'LL HAVE TO DO!
WHERE'S THE BOAT, MATE?
IT'S A RAFT, MY FRIEND! A RAFT—IDENTICAL TO THOSE ON WHICH THE NATIVES OF POONGA-WHANGA EMIGRATED 2,000 YEARS AGO AND ON IT, WE SHALL BOTH GO DOWN IN HISTORY!
HE NEVER SPOKE A TRUER WORD!
AND SO, THE FOLLOWING DAY—
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THIS WAS A RAFT, MATE! SUH! IT'S NOTHIN' BUT A BIG BUNCH O' COCONUTS!
YOUR OPINION IS OF NO IMPORTANCE, MY FRIEND! KINDLY ATTEND TO YOUR NAVIGATING!
JONAH STICKS TO NAVIGATING, AND 86 DAYS LATER—
YOU FOOL! POONGA-WHANGA IS A TROPICAL ISLAND! YOU MUST HAVE TAKEN THE WRONG TURNING AT JAKARTA!
SHUT UP!
ANOTHER 36 DAYS
A TOTAL OF 159 DAYS LATER—
PASS THAT ROCK AGAIN, SCREAM!
THAT'S THE EIGHTH TIME THIS WEEK!!
OTT, OF THE S.S. 'KLANGER' AL ANNIHILATION.
-ER- WHAT'S THAT AHEAD? BIG PATCH OF FLOATIN' -WITH TWO ENGLISH SHEEP DOGS STANDING ON IT— ON THEIR HIND LEGS!
NEXT WEEK— DAVY JONES' LOCKER!

put on line Ken's Frankie Stein and the Nervs.

I wish I could put the clock back myself where Ken is concerned. Because I had just started 2000AD when I discovered that there was a brilliant Ken Reid cartoon strip he had produced for a dummy that had never been published!!! It concerned the hideous mutant survivor of a nuclear war who had a growth on his back and every week he would try and kill himself. But each week the thing on his back would prevent him. So if he jumped off a cliff it would turn into a propeller and fly him to safety etc. You can just imagine how Ken would have drawn it! How deliciously foul and what a wonderful antidote to all those sacharine strips in Whoopee! et al. Just what I needed for the back cover of 2000AD. I had 100 per cent power to do what I wanted with 2000AD so I requisitioned the strips from the vaults. But the old regime–who often went out of their way to sabotage the new wave in comics– told me that it was conveniently 'lost'. Yeah, right.

Now, in these politically correct, dreary days of 'nice' safe comics for 'nice' children–loaded down with lots of plastic 'free' gift shite on the covers–we need subversive strips like Ken's more than ever. We need to piss off all those middle class teacher-types who–I kid you not–still despise comics like 2000AD and still want to bring back something 'educational' like Eagle, without having a clue why it worked in the first place. Only when we appall such do-gooder successors to Mary Whitehouse are we doing it right and they would certainly be appalled by Ken's best work. I look forward to their howls of disgust as the politically incorrect Frankie once again walks down the street with his boots miaowing. And so I'm sure will kids of every age, including Kevin O'Neill and Alan Moore who are also Ken Reid fans and have sung his praises in the past. ●

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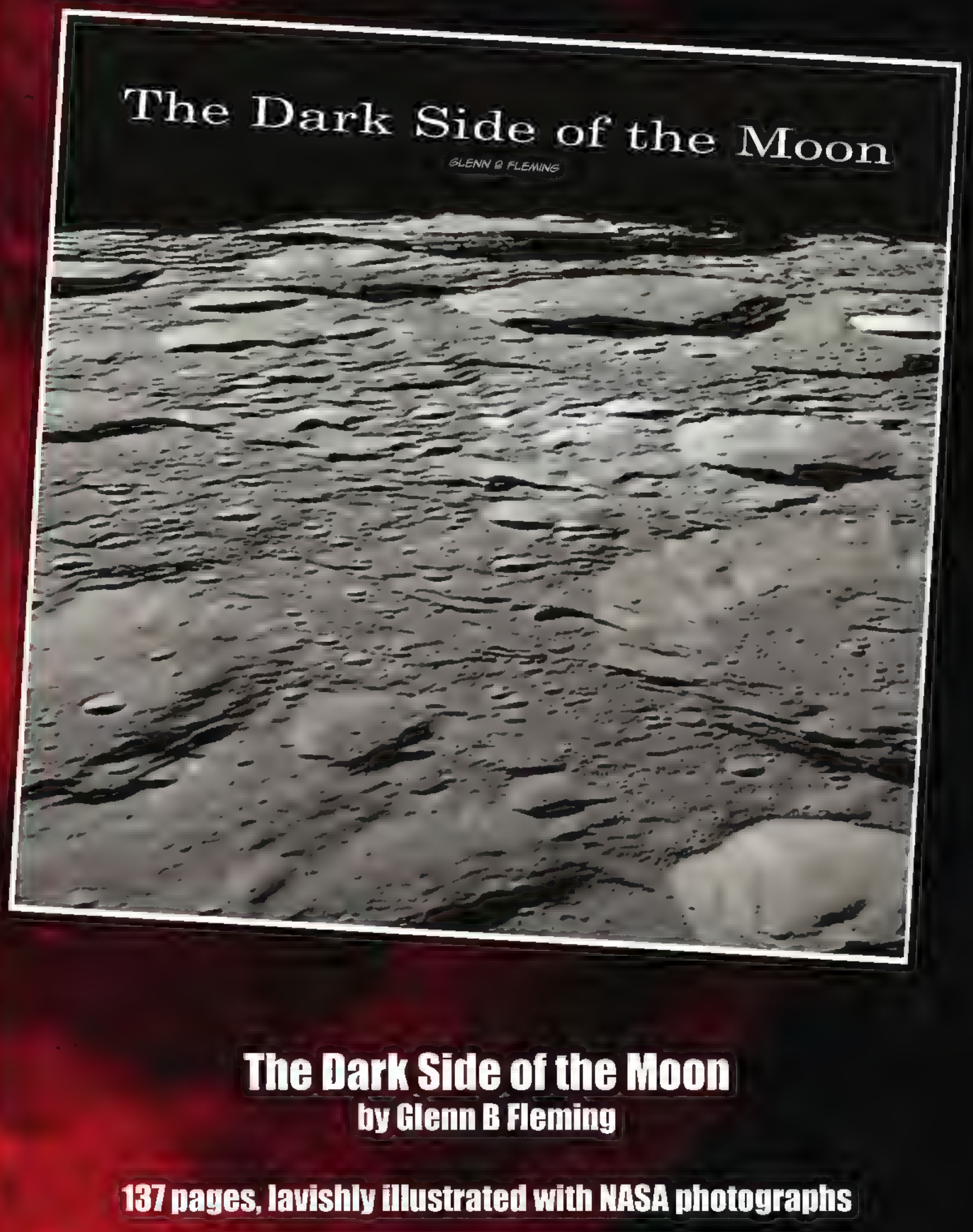

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DOUBLE DOUBLE TROUBLE:

THE COUNTERFEIT COMICS OF THORPE & PORTER

The above title is an homage to the alliterative story titles of various DC Comics classics of the sixties, rather than an actual allegation against Messrs Thorpe & Porter of Oadby, Leicestershire (I'm thinking specifically of immortal tales such as 'the Clockwork Crimes of the Time Commander', and indeed 'the Tick Tock Traps of the Time Commander'. Evidently, the Commander was a character who inspired such deathless prose). However, with the best will in the world, one cannot help but feel there is something just a little bit suspect about the legitimacy of TP's line of 'Double Double Comics' sold from 1967 onwards, perhaps some of the strangest beasts ever 'published' towards the tail end of a decade which saw more than its share of 'four color' oddities.

A little background for the uninitiated: Thorpe & Porter published a range of comics in Britain in the 1950s, most of them black and white reprints of American material, published in a format closer to the American one than the traditional British comics of the time (in fact, TP's books were slightly squarer and shorter than the US comics of the period, a format also later adopted by Alan Class Comics. These comics included material from various publishers, and included titles such as 'Justice Traps the Guilty', 'Mr. District Attorney', 'Mystery in Space', 'Out of This World', 'Race for the Moon', 'Miracle Man', 'Forbidden Worlds', 'Adventures into the Unknown', 'Young Love', 'Classics Illustrated', 'Lone Ranger', 'Mad' and even DC's 'Blackhawk' and 'Flash', amongst many others. They continued to publish titles of their own into the 1960s, including 'The Avengers' (drawn by Marvelman creator Mick Anglo and based on the popular ABC TV series) in 1966. In 1959, they also began importing actual American titles; Marvel comics distributed in Britain throughout the sixties included the line 'sole distributors in the UK, Thorpe & Porter' in the indicia. They didn't play favourites though; they imported rivals DC, too!

So, it's interesting to speculate what those two monolithic American companies, in general so protective of their material, would have made of the 'Double Double' comics, assuming they actually knew of their existence (which seems unlikely). These titles have never been definitively catalogued as far as I know, but it's generally believed there were a couple of dozen released between 1967 and 1970. Titles included 'Action', 'Adventure', 'Lois Lane', 'Jimmy Olsen', 'Batman', 'Detective', 'Superboy', 'World's Finest', 'Strange Adventures' and 'Justice League Double Double Comics', with at least a couple of those titles having more than one issue ('Action' certainly had at least three). What they were, basically, were four American comics, presumably unsold copies, rebound and repackaged under a single, new cover (the original covers were presumably simply ripped off and thrown away). Most of these books were DC's, but the odd Marvel title found its way in alongside them, and the choices as to which comics to include in which title appears to have been pretty random; Justice League Double Double, for instance, would not necessarily include any Justice League stories (one copy of Justice League Double Double actually consists of World's Finest, Metal Men and Captain Storm), and a copy of Lois Lane Double Double for some reason includes an issue of Metamorpho, the elemental freak seeming slightly out of place alongside three issues worth of adventures of 'Superman's Girlfriend', while Adventure Double Double has a triple dose of Legion of Superheroes backed up by the House of Mystery.

But if you're considering collecting these titles, be warned; there may only have been 24 titles released, but snapping up a copy of 'Batman Double Double' does not necessarily mean that you actually have the only version of that comic. They appear to have been slapped together in order to use up whichever comics were lying around, meaning that it was quite possible to pick up two copies of the same comic with the same cover and find different content inside each, the first three issues bound into them perhaps being the same in both but the last one entirely different! I myself have a copy of Action Double Double #3 which contains only three issues rather than four (one of them a copy of Amazing Spider-Man #51, sitting uncomfortably alongside DC's Doom Patrol and Blackhawk) beneath a cover which depicts the Justice League of America about to engage in an almighty punch up with their colleagues from the Justice Society, a story conspicuously absent from the actual interior of the book. I can only assume that they ran out of unsold copies of that particular issue of JLA but had a cover left over. In the circumstances though, calling that particular book a 'Double Double' seems to be something of a breach of the trades descriptions act: maybe 'Triple Comics' would have been more appropriate?

Just one more strange story from the long, colourful and frequently, one can't help but suspect, not entirely legal history of British comics...●

This is currently believed to be a complete list of the Double Double titles released: Action #1-4, Adventure #1-3, Batman #1-3, Detective #1-3, Justice League #1-2, Superboy #1-2, Superman #1-3, and single issues of Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, Strange Adventures and World's Finest. The potential variations, however, are probably far, far more.

Adventure

DOUBLE DOUBLE DOUBLE

1'9 COMICS

FEATURING SOME OF THE BOLDEST **SUPER** HEROES OF OUR TIME

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A COMICS KID

MY COMICY SATURDAY

THE BASH STREET KIDS
THE KIDS HAVE GONE NUTS ON EARTH SATELLITES EVER SINCE THE RUSS ARS SENT THEIRS UP A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO - I CAN'T STAND IT ANY LONGER!
BLEEP!
BLEEP!
BLEEP!
BLEEP!
THAT NIGHT-
I'VE HEARD THAT SCIENTISTS ARE PLANNING TO SEND UP MONKEYS IN EARTH SATELLITES NEXT- WELL I'LL DO SOME MIDNIGHT SWOTTING-
LATEST ROCKET TECHNIQUE
AND SO TO MYSELF AN EARTH SATELLITE I'LL SEND UP MY OWN LOT OF MONKEYS IN IT (YOU KNOW WHO) THAT'LL GIT RID OF THEM FOR GOOD!
ONE WEEK LATER-
HELLO MONKEYS I MEAN CHILDREN AS A TREAT I'M GOING TO LET YOU WATCH THE LAUNCHING OF MY NEW PRIVATE EARTH SATELLITE
SMASH'N GOOD OL' TEACHER
BLEEP!
BLEEP!
NO, BLACKIE! AT THIS MOMENT, THEY ARE LOOKING FOR EITHER LOUIS CRANDELL IN THE FLESH, OR A BOY OF YOUR DESCRIPTION, ACCOMPANIED BY A DISEMBODIED CLAW! THEY'D SPOT US THE MINUTE WE MADE A MOVE!
BUT NOT IF I CAN CONCEAL MY INVISIBILITY IN SOME WAY, AND DISGUISE MYSELF AT THE SAME TIME! SO, LISTEN... THERE ARE A COUPLE OF THINGS I WANT YOU TO GET FOR ME...!
AS THE INVISIBLE MAN SPOKE SWIFTLY...
COR! THAT'S A GREAT IDEA, MR CRANDELL! I'LL BE BACK WITH THE STUFF IN ABOUT THIRTY MINUTES!
I'LL WAIT IN THE SHELTER! MIND HOW YOU GO, LAD!
WORMING HIS WAY ACROSS THE AREA OF DERELICT BACK-YARDS, BLACKIE DARTED INTO A BUSY LONDON STREET...
EVERY SECOND COUNTS NOW! I THINK IT'S TIME I CALLED IN THE PARA-BRIGADE!
BUT IN HIS EXCITEMENT, THE BOY WAS UNAWARE THAT HE HAD BEEN SEEN BY A VIGILANT POLICEMAN!
BY THUNDER! I'M SURE THAT WAS YOUNG MORRIS WHO JUST JUMPED ON TO THAT BUS!
AND, SOON...
...YES! I'M ALMOST POSITIVE IT WAS THE BOY WHO IS THOUGHT TO BE HIDING OUT WITH THE CLAW!
RIGHT... STAY WHERE YOU ARE! I'LL PASS THE INFORMATION ON TO THE SHADOW SQUAD!
WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES, A SHADOW SQUAD FORCE, LED BY ITS FIERY CHIEF-MAJOR BRAND, HAD ARRIVED ON THE SCENE!
AT LAST... THE LEAD WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR! MOVE, YOU MEN! I WANT THIS WHOLE AREA CORDONED OFF!
TROOPS ONE AND TWO, FOLLOW ME!
THE MAN WHO HAD SWORN TO DESTROY LOUIS CRANDELL WAS ONLY A FEW HUNDRED YARDS AWAY FROM THE INVISIBLE MAN'S HIDING-PLACE!
SEARCH THOSE ABANDONED BUILDINGS, AND EVERY INCH OF THESE BACK-YARDS! IF CRANDELL IS HERE, NOTHING CAN SAVE HIM THIS TIME!
CRUNCH

BY DENNIS CATTELL

I grew up in Chipperfield Road, in Castle Bromwich, in Birmingham. 1970 saw me reaching the age of 11, and a family move to Halesowen, but for this article I'll stick to the Chipperfield Road years. At the top of the road was a newsagents amongst several shops, and it was to this newsagents that I owe my love of comics. Not only did they stock all of the British ones that we took, but had a revolving stand that was filled up once a month with the latest American titles. DC, Marvel, Classics Illustrated, Gold Key, and one company I can't even remember the name of, that made stars of characters like *Magicman* and *Nemesis*, and *Herbie*, a fat lollipop-sucking boy who had the weirdest adventures... God, I loved that stand and the comics my elder brother and me bought from there each month. If only I still had them now and in pristine condition... a shilling per title, if I recall correctly.

Anyway, British comics are principally what I want to talk about, scattered throughout the week as follows:

Monday was the day that the *The Dandy* and *The Beezer* came out. Start of the week, two comics, tabloid and broadsheet in size to this little lad. Nothing on Tuesday (or Thursday or Sunday). Wednesday brought *The Beano* and *The Topper*, tabloid and broadsheet again, and solely for my sister, her *Mandy*. Friday gave us *The Sparky*: just the one title, but then Saturday was just tomorrow.

Saturday was comic heaven!!

Wham!, *Pow!*, *Smash!*, *Fantastic!*, *Terrific!*, *Buster*, *Valiant*, *Cor!!*, *Whizzer and Chips*, *Shiver and Shake*,*Whoopee!*, *Look and Learn!*, *Tell Me Why*, *World Of Wonder*. Probably not all of these ran at the same time, and possibly I've left one or two titles out (*Pippin* and *Twinkle* were bought in our toddler years, most of which I've fortunately forgotten about).

Even as a lad I could recognise certain artists' styles, and realised that Winker Watson and Dirty Dick were drawn by the same guy. I could spot who took such pride in their work that they put little gags in the corner of the panels, and even had things popping out of the panel and onto the page itself (illustrator of Sweeney Toddler, I'm taking about you!!). Was it *The Topper* or *The Beezer* that ran the two page colour serial, Kidnapped College years before The Demon Headmaster on the telly, about a headmaster who hypnotised his pupils to stay under his control, having kidnapped them from various schools around the country? The twist was that under his regime, the class swots also became good at sports, and the athletes became all-round eggheads in the classroom too! When the truth came out, the headmaster was allowed to keep his school open and the boys insisted on staying there..

An alternative education was on display at schools like Bash Street or Knight School (which was run, of course, by a man who wore a suit of armour) and might best be described as creative anarchy. I loved every minute of it. Greedy Pigg was a form teacher with a weight problem due to an appetite for food he satisfied by stealing or (as Maggie Thatcher would say with her eye on the miners' wealth) sequestrating food from his pupils, who for some reason were obsessed with bringing food parcels into school and eating them in lesson time. Imagine stealing a whole cooked chicken from the fridge at home and keeping it in your school desk as a sort of trophy to dazzle your classmates with!! Looking back, I view it as an allegory using food as a sex substitute, well it was a boys' only school, if I recall correctly. Oh dear..!

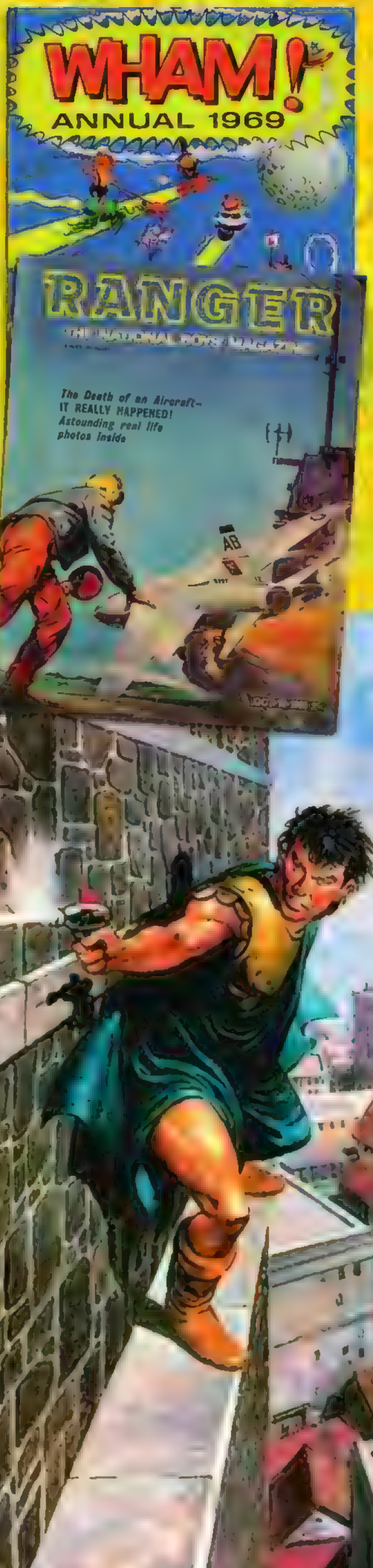
Serious serials? The Legend Testers, Janus Stark The Man With Two Faces, The Steel Claw, from *Smash!*, and from *The Valiant*, and also from that title was a strip I can't remember, about a husband and wife team who fought crime... my brain mumbles something like Jack'o'Lantern, or Jack'o'Justice, but how true that is I can't recall.

Look and Learn was wonderful. Educational stuff and *The Trigan Empire*, too! I had a letter published in a December 1970 issue, so finding a copy of that now from somewhere is sort of a Holy Grail for me... one day..

Favourite characters? From *The Sparky*, I Spy. From *Smash!*, The Legend Testers. Overall favourite comic? *Smash!* without a doubt. . full page front covers with The Man From B.U.N.G.L.E. in a deadly trap thanks to Grimly Feendish and Doctor Doom – tho' he always got out of it as we found out in the regular strip inside.

Golden days... the kids of today are the poorer for not having them.

If they only knew... ●



SUPER NATURALS

BY IAN WHEELER

In 1987, Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan President of the United States. Eastenders had only been running on the BBC for a couple of years and Sylvester McCoy took off in the TARDIS for the first time as the seventh Doctor Who. Mobile phones were the size of a brick and computers were even bigger. There was no internet, no Facebook and no ebay and Britain hadn't been run by a coalition government since the Second World War. Against this backdrop, a new comic appeared on British news-stands for the first time.

Fleetway's *Supernaturals* must surely rank as one of the shortest-lived comics of all time with just nine regular issues to its name. In common with the *Mask and Ring Raiders* comics from the same publisher, *Supernaturals* was based on a series of toys. Made by the famous Tonka toy company, the Supernaturals figures differed from other action figures in that the front of each figure consisted of a hologram showing its facial features etc giving each character a very spooky appearance. Not as famous or well-remembered as some of the major American toy lines of the time such as Transformers, Star Wars or He-Man (all of which also had their own UK comics), the Supernaturals have been described by one website (x-entertainment.com–not an adult site despite the name!) as 'one of the best and most unappreciated toy lines of their time'.

The heroes of the Supernaturals range were the Heroic Warriors, lead by Lionheart (who could transform into a lion), supported by his other warriors Eagle Eye (a Red Indian who could turn into an eagle) and Thunderbolt (a Viking who transformed into a Lightning Warrior). Their adversaries were the Warriors of Evil–Skull (a Skeletor-like warrior who could become a living skeleton), Snakebite (who transformed from snake charmer to deadly Cobra) and Burnheart (an evil knight who could

become a firey spirit). Each set of warriors were assisted by their own 'ghostlings' who, like the Warriors, had once been human but who could now also change from one thing to another. The main good ghostling was Spooks (who could change from court jester to, er, a spook and who hosted the comic's letters page) and the evil ghostlings included Scary Cat who could turn from Wicked Witch to hissing cat and who introduced a series of complete one-part stories based on ideas suggested by the readers. Vehicles and playsets for the toy range included The Tomb of Doom (similar to He-Man's Castle Grayskull) and Bat-Bopper and Ghost Finder, two awesome cars which resembled Monster Trucks, putting them somewhat at odds with the more Medieval flavour of the action figures.

Supernaturals first appeared as a preview comic given away free with other comics such as *Eagle*, along with a colourful fact card, in October 1987. The first regular issue was cover-dated 31 October to 13 November 1987 (*Supernaturals* was a fortnightly publication) with a cover price of 40p and both this and the second issue came with a free mask. The comic was initially printed on glossy paper although this was replaced by a cheaper matte-finish paper after only four issues. The artists working on the comic were not credited but appeared to include John Gillatt (who was unable to recall working on the title when I interviewed him a few years back), John Cooper, Geoff Campion and Jim Watson and Ian Kennedy contributing cover art. Campion, Cooper and Watson were of course well used to drawing stories based on action figures as they were both major contributors to Fleetway's *Battle Action Force* comic.

The comic's main strips featured the Supernaturals themselves, with each set of warriors battling it out for supremacy of Ghostworld, 'the parallel warp that runs alongside our Earth, our time.' It was explained that throughout the centuries, men had found the Tomb of Doom and by entering through its doors 'made the journey into Ghostworld where they would be trapped until the force called Specter decided to release them...release them with incredible new powers.' To Specter, neither good nor evil mattered 'save that both must be total!' The Supernaturals returned to our reality via The Tomb of Doom and caused havoc in such varied locations as a transatlantic flight from New York to London and a safari park!

Another popular regular story was entitled The Doll which told of an evil ventriloquist's doll which came to life and did unspeakably nasty things, a well-worn theme from vintage films such as 1940s classic British horror movie Dead of Night and 1964s' Devil Doll although *Supernaturals* readers were unlikely to have seen such films! Readers were able to win a very generous £5 by suggesting what might happen in the following week's

THE CURSE
IN 16TH CENTURY LONDON THE EVIL SUPERNATURALS HAVE WREAKED UNTOLD HAVOC IN THEIR MISE EN SCENE TO RELEASE THE GRIM CURSE OF THE SORCERER BRITANNICUS, ENTOMBED CENTURIES PREVIOUSLY BY ROMAN CONQUERORS. LIONHEART, EAGLE EYE AND SPOOKS HAVE FOLLOWED THEM. BUT NOW THE GOOD SUPERNATURALS RUN INTO DETERMINED OPPOSITION!
SOLDIERS AHEAD, LIONHEART... ABOUT TO AMBUSH US!
THEIR BULLETS WON'T HARM US—BUT SOMEHOW WE HAVE TO PASS WITHOUT CAUSING THEM INJURY!
A HAIL OF LEAD STORMS THROUGH THE TARGET!
WHAT A CURIOUS SENSATION. A SLIGHT TICKLING, PERHAPS!
A DETACHMENT OF FUSILIERS STOLIDLY BRAVE IN THE FACE OF THE UNKNOWN!
BE THEY FIENDS OR MORTALS— LET 'EM HAVE IT, LADS!
THIS IS NO TIME FOR JESTING, SPOOKS! OUR VEHICLE IS VULNERABLE!

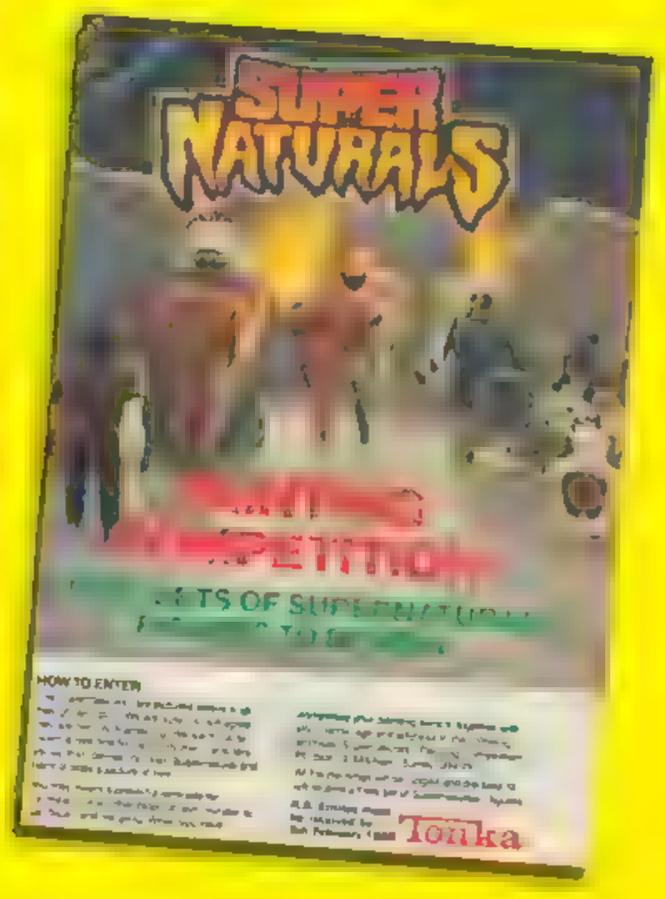
DUMBHEAD! YOU ARE IN YOUR PRIMARY FORM! THEY ARE IN THEIR SECONDARY STATE! YOUR FLAME-GUN CANNOT HURT THEM!
BEFORE BURNHEART CAN MAKE HIS CHANGE, THUNDER BOLT HURLS A LIGHTNING BLAST.
I CHEAT YOU OF YOUR PREY, EVIL ONE!
THRASSSSSA!
GET THOSE HYPNOTISED HUMANS OUT OF THE WAY, THUNDER BOLT! I'M GOING FOR SKULL HIMSELF!
UHHHH!
DID YOU NOT LEARN BURNHEART'S LESSON? YOU ARE IN PRIMARY FORM AND CAN DO ME NO HARM!
THE EVIL GHOSTLINGS DECIDE TO TAKE A HAND! VAMP-PA, RAGS, WEIRD WOLF AND SCARY CAT ASSUME THEIR SECONDARY FORMS..
FOR DESTRUCTION, AND THE SAFETY OF OUR MASTER!
THE LEGEND OF THE
SUPER NATURALS
BUT IN A FLASH OF LIGHT LIONHEART AND THUNDER BOLT ARRIVE ON THE SCENE.
SHAMMM!
WAIT! YOUR VILE SPORT IS OVER!
NOW YOU HAVE US TO RECKON WITH!
CURSE YOU! YOU WILL BURN FOR YOUR INTRUSION!
SHA-TAMMMMMM!
MEET A FIERY END FROM MY FLAME-GUN!

instalment but that was nothing compared to the ten quid they could get for suggesting a complete story for the Scary Cat challenge–some of which were very good and really quite unsettling! Incidentally, although most of the comic was printed in black and white the occasional strip was presented in full colour.

The Supernaturals letters page was great fun and readers were able to nominate people to be 'Trapped in the Tomb' (Terry Wogan, Michael Jackson, Nina Myskow and Michael Barrymore were amongst those that suffered that fate) or turned into a ghostling (Rolf Harris and Bruce Forsyth both being nominated for this).

As previously stated, *Supernaturals* ran for just nine issues. There was one Holiday Special and a Supernaturals Adventure Book. The Holiday Special was released in March 1988 and contained a number of Supernatural stories along with a couple of modified one-off horror stories which had first appeared in the pages of Scream and the usual mix of pin-ups, readers artwork and a quiz. The Adventure Book cost a whopping £2.25 and contained a similar mix of material and was described in an advertisement in the comic as 'the book that's too good to miss!'

I was sorry that *Supernaturals* did not last longer and was not merged into another title. After the sad departure of *Scream*, it had been nice to have another horror comic, albeit one aimed at a younger audience.There is a desperately small amount of material about *Supernaturals* on the internet although a television commercial for the toys can be found on You Tube. ●



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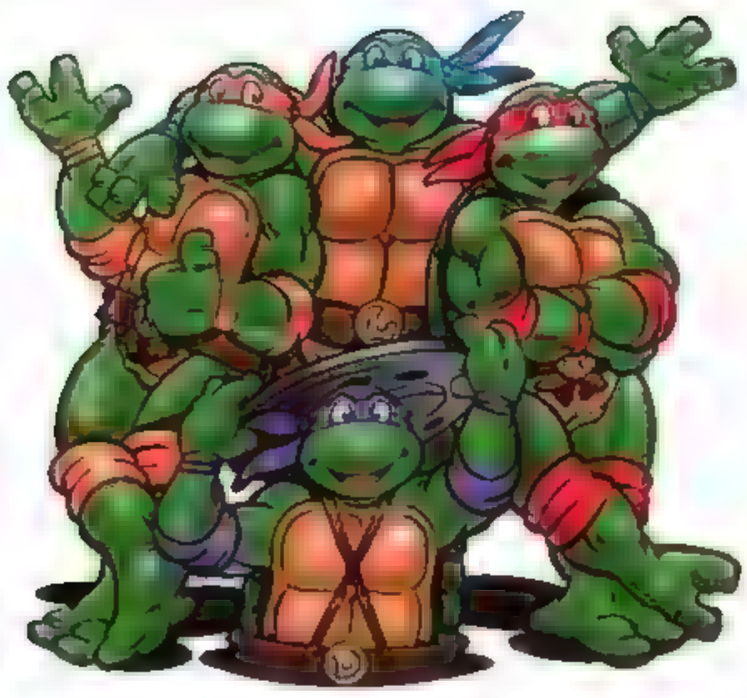

product of the 80s

*Born in the West Midlands at the beginning of the 1980s, **Alex Wiggan** shunned the limitations imposed by half-day closing on a Wednesday and refused bottles of free school milk, in order to establish himself as an individual. Keeping this goal firmly in his mind he sought out ways to develop his creativity and soon found himself fixated with comics, where he was able to tap into realities that knew no boundary. Over the years the comics became a constant companion and he let his love for them guide him towards his new role of informing the world of their magnificence. Now, with Joe-public facing constant hardships he hopes to relieve the stress of everyday life, and unite fans of comics everywhere*

It wasn't all about shoulder pads, Bullseye and Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s, there was also something else going on which helped shape the decade. For a generation who were less than interested in Bully's star prize or watching the Prime Minister put in an appearance on Saturday Superstore, there was something far more captivating for their minds. One day it could be watching Autobot leader Optimus Prime blasting seven bells of hell out of Megatron on Transformers and the next it would be seeing He-Man and Skeletor bickering like an old married couple on Masters of the Universe. Of course these were cartoon shows of the 1980s and thanks to an element of fantasy meeting technology in their conception; they were the new and exciting way to engage young impressionable minds in a way that hadn't been seen before. In truth a lot of these shows were designed purely to promote a toy range, in fact that really was the basis for Mattel's He-Man and The Masters of the Universe, but once they had viewers hooked, that was it, and they had fans for life. But with this being the 1980s and TV

channels being somewhat limited, the opportunity to devour more information about all those magical characters had to come from somewhere else. The hope from toy manufacturers was to see a wave of children dragging their parents into the nearest Woolies, but as times were tight it was instead the perfect opportunity for children to become hooked on comics depicting their idols instead.

During the decade and reaching into the 90s, characters such as the Thundercats, Defenders of the Earth, Transformers, The Real Ghostbusters, Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles, Centurions, Around the World with Willy Fog and Action Force were hitting the UK's local paper shops. Offering on a fortnightly basis the kind of thrills and spills only a comic could, the characters were given an extended lease of life in the pages of a colourful publication, which would attempt to enhance the experience of being immersed in the world of these creations. So there were free badges, posters, sticker albums and stickers to go alongside the comic panels, but the way in which the reader was addressed was the key to keeping issues continually selling. Instead of just a nameless editor who the readership had no interest in hearing from, the comics were often put together thanks to characters appearing in the stories. Ok, so it may have been highly questionable as to how Snarf from the Thundercats comic could manage to consistently hammer out a 30 page title whilst also sorting out Lion-O's laundry every other day, but somehow he managed it. This clever approach to reach the reader made perfect sense and was a technique often used to address the real people who pick up the title. The Snarf's and Slimer's of the cartoon world were used to give children a character they could identify with and although at times it could seem odd as to why a child living in Birmingham would identify with a ravenous floating bogie, they clearly did the trick. So if a 6 year old from Stockport or an eleven year old from Birkenhead wrote into the Thundercats comic just to let the world know that they thought Panthro was the greatest mechanic on Third Earth, or that Cheetara had such fabulous hair, they knew that someone important to them was reading. This really helped, meaning that from the moment the Thunder-Chat mailbag was opened with the 7th issue, there was a creature who could offer a response to all those questions that only someone on the inside could give an answer to. If a question was asked, such as why there was no fan club or when character fact files were to appear, Snarf would be able to provide a response without coming across as being a bit of a party pooper, if the news wasn't good. It also meant that the chance to become a Star Prize Winner, by writing a good letter, wasn't just the opportunity to bag a free copy of the annual for being the most literate that issue, but it was also a way of getting recognition from one of the team, which was frankly more important.

Cartoons were great ways for publishers to bring out comics that they knew would sell, and Marvel UK found that it was good business sense to have these titles available, which seemed to have a much larger appeal than their superhero offerings. Costumed heroes like Spidey and the Hulk were known to the public, and were always around, but they weren't the current flavour of the month in the same way that say The

Ghostbusters were. This meant there was clearly a gap in the market that needed to be filled, and children were more eager than ever to convince their parents to let them pick up a comic, when they were round the corner shop topping up the gas card. The Real Ghostbusters which launched in 1988 ran for a hefty 193 issues, featured a great deal of home grown content and even had a number of annuals. Marvel's Action Force comic, the UK's branding of G.I. Joe wasn't as popular, but still had quite a following and even a lesser known property like The Adventures of The Galaxy Rangers made it to shelves as well. They were not alone and those robots in disguise the Transformers were a big hit, and even incorporated the short-lived Visionaries, a group of mystical knights who could transform into animals, as a back-up strip. Over the course of the decade Centurions PowerXtreme, a cartoon that had to compete with Gaz Top's increasingly distracting hair on CITV's Get Fresh was turned into a comic, as was MASK, the Star Wars spinoff Ewoks, and Masters of The Universe. The Jules Verne inspired Around the World with Willy Fog followed the adventures of a lion abroad, kind of like Judith Chalmers only hairier and comic-strip legends Flash Gordon, The Phantom and Mandrake the Magician teamed up in Defenders of the Earth. Every property benefited from seeing itself in print after having a twenty minute animated advert to create interest, and this meant big titles could roll off the press without the need to worry if people would pick up that first issue. There of course were always incentives of free gifts and that was part of the nature of the business, as it is today, but by being an already established brand, half the battle was already over. The decade that created consumer interest in toy ranges by simply making cartoons to show off the product it wanted to sell, had successfully managed to create a way forward for the UK comics industry.

However, with this being UK publications based on mostly American financed cartoons, and with the comics coming out on a quick succession, just reprinting the stories from the US alone would mean they would run out of material very quickly. For a comic based on the incredibly popular, pizza loving Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles cartoon, Eastman and Laird's Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles Adventures had a readymade fan base chomping at the pepperoni covered bit. Cartoons of the 80s had changed the way children interacted with colourful heroes and villains, and from the moment the Turtles had burst onto screens on Children's BBC, they were a firm favourite. If keeping all the Turtles fans happy meant having to mix things up a little bit in the pages of the comic to keep it alive, then that was what would happen.

So when Fleetway Publications Turtles comic first hit shelves at the start of 1990 it began reprinting issues of the American Archie Comics, which had been adapted from early episodes of the television show. The monthly Archie Comics themselves had proved successful and had quickly dropped the adaptations to take the stories in a different direction, eventually running for seventy two issues, but in order to keep fortnightly titles going, the UK comic had to create strips of its own. So sometimes the comic would reprint the Archie stories and other times they would feature a couple of tales from UK writers such as Scott Goodall and David Robinson and artists like Richard Elson and Mick Austin. These stories would be very different and were a clear distinction stylistically from the very animated Archie interpretation, but they kept the comic filled. It was a reasonable way to keep the magazine ticking along at a quicker pace than the American comics were produced and if the incredible successful UK Transformers comic had proved which had done the same trick before; it was a good way forward for a title. For readers it did create a bit of a disjointed continuity to the Turtles adventures, but it still charged them up with all the kind of action that they could dream of. Also just like with the Thundercats, the awesome foursome of Leonardo, Donatello, Raphael and Michaelangelo, were on hand to answer reader's letters or to comment on artwork submitted from kids handy with a pack of felt tip pens. Clearly a product of their environment, the issues were also crammed with ads for Turtles paraphernalia that was currently available, like copies of the cartoon on VHS or membership to the fan club. The Turtles were a culmination of all of the factors driving 80s cartoons into producing marketable products and it made them extremely popular very quickly. The comic provided an outlet to this and outside of the sea of merchandise associated with the brand it was a more creative window, offering readers the chance to interact with likeminded fans.

The 1980s had led the way forward for a lot of comics in the UK, and the increasing interest in companies keen to develop their toys by the use of cartoons, meant that this was

something that would become synonymous with the industry. If a cartoon didn't become a comic during that period then chances are it probably isn't fondly remembered in the same nostalgic way as the ones that did. Being able to hum the theme tune is one thing, but digging out a badge or sheet of stickers from the loft, that came free with a comic creates a sense of nostalgia like nothing else. The decade saw the true potential of making money through the close connection between cartoons and comics, and it pulled it off productively so that readers were enjoying themselves in the same way they did when they tuned into their favourite television shows. For many, this was their first time reading a comic or even following a particular title but it created a connection which perhaps they couldn't get as they waited the following week for the next episode to be shown. There may have been some dark days during the 1980s but for a generation there was no time quite like it, and thanks to the lives of those living on the planet Eternia, Cybertron or even in the sewers of New York City there was no time more exciting. ●

In the last regular issue of Crikey!, we looked at the Action Force strips in the IPC/Fleetway publication Battle Action Force. But that wasn't the end of the story. Although Fleetway lost the rights t o run Action Force material, the baton passed to Marvel UK. Ian Wheeler tells us all about it...

INTO ACTION (AGAIN!)

At this time, Marvel were enjoying considerable success publishing titles based on popular film and toy franchises, notably Return of the Jedi, Spider-man and Zoids and Transformers, so Action Force was a natural addition to their comics range. As previously discussed, the British Action Force figures had been a repackaged version of the American GI Joe toys. It was therefore natural that Marvel UK should produce an Action Force comic as they were able to utilise Marvel US GI Joe strips, making minor alterations where necessary.

The 24 page Marvel UK Action Force comic began in February 1987. Issue one came with a fabulous free gift - issue two! This was a highly original way to launch a new comic and gave readers twice as much action for their first dose of the title.

The comic followed a simple format - two or three stories in each issue with a small number of supporting features. Generally, the stories consisted of one new UK-originated strip and two US GI Joe reprints (or, for a while, an unrelated back-up strip-Marvel's 'Master of Kung-Fu'). Writers for the British strip included Mike Collins, and big-name artists such as Geoff Senior and Kev Hopgood worked on the title. The features included a letters page (Mail Call) and Intelligence Profiles of the various Action Force characters. There was also a one -page funny in the form of Lew Stringer s Combat Colin - a hapless would-be soldier whose ambitions far exceeded his abilities.

Perhaps the highpoint of the comics run came when, from issues 24 - 27, the title ran Ancient Relics, a crossover story featuring the Transformers which had begun in Transformers issue 125. (Transformers had already featured a four-part Action Force back-up strip and an AF mini-comic.)

Sadly, the weekly Action Force comic came to an end after 50 issues. But that was not the final end. At the time, Marvel UK was experimenting with monthly titles published in the smaller-sized US format (rather like the Panini Classic Editions which fill British comic racks today). These included Death's Head and Dragon's Claws and there were also plans for a Zoids comic (flying solo after their appearances alongside Spiderman) although this did not materialise. Action Force was added to the roll call and the monthly Action Force ran for a respectable 15 issues (and was reprinted in the US as GI Joe–European Missions). In addition, the reprints of the American GI Joe strips crossed over, in February 1988, to the Transformers comic, which first became known as Transformers and Action Force from issue 153, then switched to Transformers and GI Joe from issue 249. From issue 306, in January 1991, GI Joe was dropped from the title. Transformers itself would run for another 30 issues.

After finishing in Transformers, GI Joe/Action Force ran for a while in the short-lived The Incredible Hulk Presents, a comic for younger readers, for 12 issues from October to December 1989.

It should also be noted that there were five Action Force holiday specials and five annuals, although latterly both went out under the GI Joe title.

In the last couple of years, there has been a new UK comic; GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra was launched to tie in with the 2009 film, published by Panini and running original British-originated strips rather than reprints of US material. Sadly this lasted only six issues.

INTERVIEW: KEV HOPGOOD

Kev Hopgood is one of Britain s most successful comic artists and was one of Action Force s most popular and prolific contributors. Crikey! caught up with him whilst he was still working on the short-lived Panini GI Joe comic.

Crikey!: I get the impression looking at your Action Force artwork that you were happy drawing either characters or hardware/vehicles but did you have a preference between the two?

KH: I like drawing both, which is why Action Force was such a cool strip to draw. I m drawing GI Joe right now for Panini, so I m getting to do it all over again!

Crikey!: Was there an AF character you particularly enjoyed drawing? I thought your depiction of Destro was especially effective.

KH: It s a toss up between Snake Eyes and Destro. I've just finished a story which featured Snake Eyes, and Ferg Handley, the writer, has managed to squeeze Destro into the next one I'm doing.

Crikey!: You drew an AF/Transformers crossover story - did this present any particular challenges?

KH: I can't even remember doing that one! My first comics gig was drawing Zoids, and I always preferred them to Transformers. I just couldn't get my head around the whole turning into a truck thing.

Crikey!: You were voted 'favourite artist' in an Action Force readers' poll. Given that you were up against the likes of Geoff Senior, how did you feel about this accolade?

KH: Again, I didn't even know that! Geoff's a great artist, so I'm honoured to have pipped him to the post!

Crikey!: Action Force went monthly and adopted the smaller US-style format. Was there a difference in how you drew the art for the monthly? Was the art smaller than for the weekly?

KH: No, we always drew it at about A3. The only difference was that we had more pages to play with.

Crikey!: What were the advantages/disadvantages of drawing characters that already existed as toys?

KH: The advantage is that you don't have to make as much stuff up! That's also the disadvantage, as you can't expect to get royalties on someone els's property.

Crikey!: Have you seen the GI Joe film? What were your thoughts on it?

KH: As I mentioned, I'm back drawing Snake Eyes & Co. so I had to see the film for research! It's got plot holes you can drive a Cobra tank through, but it looks great and had great action sequences. It does exactly what it says on the tin.

THE PARTY'S OVER!
IT CERTAINLY IS FUNNY I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT ACTION FORCE WERE THE GATE CRASHERS
DROP THE GUN
AH-STORM SHADOW -
THAT'S BETTER NOW LET'S SEE WHAT WE'VE GOT ACTION FORCE'S LEADER OUR CAPTIVE. YOUR LOOK OUT ALMOST CELTA NLY CRAD. AND YOUR MAN IN THE HOLD BEHIND WHAT A SHAMBLES
THE SABOTEUR HAS BEEN NEUTRALISED HOWEVER I WAS TOO LATE TO PREVENT HIM FROM PRIMING
AND NO TIME TO UNLOAD YOUR ARMS CACHE FACE IT COBRA COMMANDER THIS LITTLE OPERATION OF YOURS

INTERVIEW: LEE SULLIVAN

Lee Sullivan is famous for drawing Transformers and the Doctor Who comic strip for Marvel UK. Although not a regular Action Force contributor, he drew the cover of the first combined issue of Transformers and Action Force, one of only two Transformers issues to feature Action Force on the cover.

Crikey!: What are your general memories of working for Marvel UK in the 80s - was there a good 'vibe'?

LS: John Higgins took me in to show my stuff to Marvel and 2000AD. The Marvel guys were very friendly and welcoming. Richard Starkings, Simon Furman and Ian Rimmer were my main initial editorial contacts; Steve White, Euan Peters, John Tomlinson later and John Freeman with Doctor Who; subsequently Gary Russell, Alan Barnes and Scott Gray for DWM.

When I first went there I liked the fact that it was a busy but relaxed atmosphere with lots of water pistols and blow-up dinosaurs etc. around the office–and no-one seemed to be condescending, which wasn't the case elsewhere! I was already a freelance illustrator working in advertising, and the money was terrible in comparison, so in a sense I could take-it-or-leave-it; but I was keen to do something in comics and Ian offered me covers on Transformers. I used my airbrush techniques on the covers and they went down well, so I got more to do and eventually tried out a comic strip for Simon and that was it. Part of the fun was that we d meet up at the Valiant Trooper pub near Goodge Street in London every month or so, and that was a great way of moving from one thing to another; when Richard was looking for artists for Doctor Who I said "I'd like one" and I got one simple as that, which directly or indirectly has lead to most of the projects I've worked on since. In fact, Richard recommended me to Marvel US for RoboCop and the current colourist I'm working with was recommended by Richard too, twenty years later!

Nothing lasts forever though, and after I started working for the US I made sort of guest appearances for DWM as and when I could, but the team had started to split by then anyway; Rich was in the US starting Comicraft, Si moved on to freelance writing and a whole new bunch of people took over, all of whom were very friendly and good to work with, but the gang thing had become a different set of faces. Also the whole Marvel UK explosion happened whilst I was off doing RoboCop and TekWorld and it produced a more febrile, ambitious and not particularly relaxed atmosphere. Not horrible, just less enjoyable.

Crikey!: You did a stunning cover for Transformers and Action Force issue

PLEASE STATE YOUR FULL NAME AND THE LOCATION OF YOUR ABODE
I AM THE DOCTOR AND MY ABODE IS RATHER NO-FIXED ! I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW THE EXACT NATURE OF THE CRIME OF WHICH I HAVE BEEN ACCUSED
WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOU ARE GUILTY OF A SCALE TEN OFFENCE THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WHOLE WORLD AND ALL LIFE ON DINOBOGUS
"GUILTY" ? BUT THE TRIAL HASN'T EVEN -
ALL LIFE IN SACROSANCT THE VORTEXIAN UNION IS PLEDGED TO SAFE-GUARD ALL SENTIENT LIFE
WELL I'M VERY GLAD TO HEAR IT BUT CONCERNING MY ACTUAL TRIAL-
IT IS A SCALE SEVEN OFFENCE FOR AN INNOCENT CITIZEN TO BE PLACED IN THE ARENA
OH ! I SEE I SUPPOSE THAT MUST SAVE YOUR JUDICIAL SYSTEM A GREAT DEAL OF TIME
VERY EFFICIENT
HEY ARE YOU FOLKS SURE YOU WANT TO GO TO THE ARENA ? LOOKS ROUGH TYPES THERE THIS TIME OF NIGHT
AYE WE'RE SURE DON'T SPOIL THE WORLD, ALL RIGHT ?
EXACTLY WHEN DID THE VORTEXIANS ARRIVE ON DINOBOGUS, MR RONAYNE ?
IT'S BEEN OVER TWENTY YEARS NOW, ZOE

153. Was this entirely your own composition or something suggested by the editor? When doing covers for the likes of Transformers what was the general procedure?

LS: Simon provided a short cover description and usually a drawing too. My technique was to redraw it as a pencil rough, post or fax the results through; get it approved then draw the black and white inked version, get it approved again and then apply airbrush and coloured inks, watercolour and gouache.

The finished art would be posted Special Delivery. Scanning was just coming in by then, but the art had to be flexible in order to wrap around a drum which rotated over a laser! Before laser scanning, photographic cameras using film were used.

Crikey!: You've drawn for Action Man, a toy closely linked to Action Force. How does drawing characters based on toys compare to drawing real people e.g. Sylvester McCoy for Doctor Who. Is it harder to bring these characters to life?

LS: I found Transformers tough at first because I just didn t understand them. They changed size and volume when they transformed and didn't really have much in the way of faces. I looked hard at Geoff Senior s versions to get a handle on them, so my early stuff looked like his. When I started working on Action Man I just followed what John Ross was doing; it was a look and format that was very clearly defined and the license holders were very particular about the likeness of the toy. I tried always to draw him as I would have an idealised James Bond. Working on Who was always tricky likenesses-wise, but I got thrown in at the deep end with my first strip which had seven Doctors and various companions to get to grips with. I got that assignment because I drew Richard Branson into my first strip for the Transformers weekly magazine. I suppose my likenesses are one of my strengths and I like doing them, and I've been lucky to build a career out of doing them. Having said that, my current project features no likenesses at all and that's a great relief!

Crikey!: Have you see the GI Joe film and do you read any of the many GI Joe comics?

LS: No. Haven't avoided them, they just haven t come my way. I love film, but I actually don't read many comics. I like drawing them though. It's my way of making movies!

Crikey!: It seems to be easier these days to launch a comic if it is based on a toy range. What are your thoughts on this situation?

LS: I think that s been the case for twenty years and it's a bit of a no-brainer; if you have a popular toy range you have a built-in audience. There are an enormous variety of entertainments for young people these days, and nothing survives very long without a large enough audience willing to support it. I don't think there's much wrong with that as long as the stories they generate are well-made. Regardless of the concept, I think the greatest crime is when huge amounts of effort and money are spent on badly-written material.

Crikey!: Drawing Doctor Who, Transformers or Action Force all required you to draw both people and technology. Which are you happiest drawing?

LS: I don t have a preference; I like drawing. You have to construct each object with the same degree of care or things just look bad, whatever they are. In comics, you can't get away (much) with just drawing faces or people, they all exist in an environment which consists of architecture and technology and natural objects in equal amounts. I've recently been drawing a fair amount of wildlife too, which I haven't had to do much of since I trained as a wildlife and technical illustrator 30 years ago. That's been satisfying, particularly as the break seems to have done me some good. Drawing aliens etc., has somehow improved my ability to draw birds! One of the key things in drawing generally and comics in particular is to introduce movement into the work; I finally feel that I m getting to grips with a lot of the elements that make for good sequential art. ●

With thanks to Kev and Lee.

For more on Action Force, check out www.bloodforthebaron.com.

DAVROS, I CAN OFFER YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO START AGAIN.
I CAN TAKE YOU TO A PLANET WHERE AN ARMY OF THOUSANDS OF DALEKS IS FROZEN, AWAITING RELEASE.
PERHAPS THEY WILL EMERGE AS THE MASTERLESS CREATURES OF EXTERMINATION THAT YOU CREATED.
OR PERHAPS THEY WILL BE FREED, NOT ONLY FROM THEIR ICY PRISON, BUT ALSO FROM THEIR MINDLESS MISSION OF UNIVERSAL DOMINATION.
THERE IS NO QUESTION IN MY MIND THAT ONE DAY, THEY WILL BE AWAKENED. NOTHING STAYS FROZEN FOREVER.
A SECOND CHANCE.
WHAT AN INTERESTING IDEA, DOCTOR...

I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER
I'VE FAILED YOU AGAIN
WHAT IS THIS THING? WHY WERE YOU TRYING TO BLOW IT UP?
I'M ONLY JUST BEHIND YOU IN THIS CITY
THAT ARE YOU INSANE? YOU'RE TRYING TO DESTROY THE ENTIRE BEING OF THIS PLANET
I HAD TO TRY AND FIND OUT WHO BUILT IT AND WHY
I HAD TO TRY AND FIND OUT WHO BUILT IT AND WHY
NOW THIS IS MY PRESENCE
BUT WE'VE ONLY JUST ARRIVED! WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE WE ARE!
BOND! SCENE OF CYCLICAL TIME PARADOX! BUT WITHOUT THE BEARD OF IT
WE HAVE TO GO BACK! THERE'S SOMETHING WE HAVE TO DO SECOND!

LONG, LONG AGO, IN A PUBLISHING GALAXY, FAR, FAR AWAY:

BY STEVE HOOKER

Here's some heresy for you: I don't rate *2000AD*.

Now, I suspect *2000AD* fanatics are busily donning homemade, slightly homoerotic Judge Dredd uniforms as we speak, checking the rounds in their lawgivers and dreaming of being astride their hogs (which isn't, surprisingly, an offence in all the states of the USA), Hell-bent on my demise.

But whoa there, latent judges, bear with me for a moment, before you do that judging thing and open a can of whupass, and I will explain all.

Aged 15, my perception of Tharg The Mighty was of an immensely cheesy character in a faintly ridiculous costume and way too condescending for my tastes, when *2000AD* debuted in February 1977. I also deemed the free gift in that first issue as beneath my comic buying contempt; frankly, a machine gun, a mine or a grenade would have piqued my interest more. Consequently, I turned my nose up at *2000AD* and carried on with my usual UK comic reading habits of war, war and, naturally enough, more war.

Some people, Paul Weller no doubt amongst them, might have said my comic reading life was in a rut!

A few years after 1977 I did spot that first issue of *2000AD*, pinned to the wall of London's *Dark They Were And Golden Eyed*, and had second thoughts about my stance, particularly with the £15 price tag that adorned it. From an eBay point of view, my teenage aghast at *2000AD* has been financial suicide, for which I kick myself everyday.

I scroll through those *2000AD* early issues and realise I could have brought a 50 inch flat screen TV with the profits by now. Damn my adolescence pretentiousness.

THE TIME WARDEN BADGE, ONE OF SEVERAL GIVEN AWAY FREE WITH STAR-LORD #1

I did eventually jump on the *2000AD* bandwagon for two very good reasons, firstly, a comic collecting friend recommended Brian Bolland's *Judge Death* (I grew to prefer Judge Fish and Judge Anderson, but she had her knockers) and secondly some nameless, soulless accountant at IPC had cancelled the only worthy science fiction title to come out of IPC in the late 1970s.

Namely, *Star-Lord*.

For me, *2000AD* has become a bit like Microsoft's Windows or Apple's iPod, the de facto standard that everyone agrees is the best example of what it is. Which, of course, it is not. The resulting status is just a heady mixture of marketing, BS and consumer intransigence!

Looking at that first issue of *Star-Lord*, published in May 1978, a year after *2000AD*, demonstrates my argument perfectly. Plus *Star-Lord*'s free gift was a shiny badge in six designations of rank: Time Warden, Laser Specialist, Tank Commander, Skateboard Strike Force, Pilot and Mek War Controller Robot Regiment'.

Then there was *Star-Lord* himself, a sort of clean cut chap, noble, upright and talking my kind of lingo; English, rather than Alienese. *Star-Lord* was more on the ball as well and quick to inform the readers of his

escape from 'satanic forces who cast their monstrous shadow across the entire Universe'. I figured *Star-Lord* was either referring to IPC's horde of blood-thirsty accountants or that working class scallywag *2000AD*. Either way, the man was astute.

Star-Lord was priced at the unheard of 12p, compared to *2000AD*'s 8p. Monetarily, nothing, but thirty-one years ago, that extra 4p would have brought a three piece suit, a night out on the town, the entrance fee to a night club, a lady of the night, a plate of chips, a taxi home, a G and T and another taxi the following day, to the clap clinic. Well, at that's how I remember my nostalgic Saturday nights.

IPC bestowed *Star-Lord* with high production values, posh paper rather than the er.....bog standard toilet paper of say *2000AD*. *Star-Lord* also had a ground-breaking eight full colour pages per issue, as opposed to IPCs usual, penny-pinching four colour pages.

Star-Lord, for me, for all its prestige, had an underdog status when compared to the gravitas *2000AD* was beginning to gather about itself. This did not mean the strips in *Star-Lord* reflected that status. True, *Star-Lord* only lasted 22 issues, one summer special and two annuals. Yet, measuring success in numbers was not always the whole picture of any comics' worth. I still pine for *Jet*, (IPC, May – Sept 1971, 22 issues). I mean what has happened to *Jet's Kids From Stalag 41*? Are they all in the care of Social Workers now the war is over? Which would be about the same as their German prisoner of war camp but without the uniforms or the compassion.

I digress.

Whilst *Star-Lord* would come to play second fiddle to Thargo-mania, it featured characters that surpassed Judge Dredd and co any day of the week. Characters >

BELOW: ONE OF STAR-LORD'S MOST POPULAR CHARACTERS, STRONTIUM DOG BY CARLOS EZQUERRA

MY BRAIN IS A TIME BOMB: MIND WARS OF ARDENI LAKAM

BY TONY INGRAM

There were two other ongoing series' in *Star-Lord*'s short but memorable run. One was *Holocaust* (issues # 14-22, the story of CIA agent turned private eye Carl Hunter's quest to stop an alien conspiracy that turned out to be masterminded by extraterrestrial rats) and the other was possibly one of the most undeservedly underappreciated SF strips Fleetway ever came up with: Mind Wars! *Mind Wars*, by Alan Hebden and Redondo, ran from *Star-Lord*'s second issue to its final one, and told the decidedly harrowing story of Ardeni Lakam and her twin brother Arlen, two youths from the human colony world Vulcrugon in the year 3000AD who develop awesome and slightly sinister psychic powers and become pawns in a deadly chess game between the human led Stellar Federation and the alien Jugla. It sounds like just another clichéd SF tale, but Mind Wars was surprisingly complex and adult in its approach; and by 'adult', I don't just mean the fact that Ardeni for some reason spends most of the story either half naked or dressed in an open vest and semi-transparent harem pants!

In most of these stories there are good guys and bad guys, but in Mind Wars the humans are pretty much as despicable as the Jugla (the exception being Tilman, the Federation special agent who turns on his superiors to help the kids) and even Ardeni is frequently more frighteningly vengeful than heroic-particularly after #11 in which, in a move which shocked the readership, Ardeni herself is forced to kill her brother Arlen, now under the control of the Jugla, in order to stop him detonating Earth's sun with a fusion bomb (until then, Arlen had effectively been an equal co-star: it was like Batman killing Robin!). Redondo's art is as strong as Hebden's uncompromising scripts, the sexy but scary Ardeni both beautiful and frightening when she uses her powers. There is a surreal quality to some of it which puts much of the rest of the content of even the wonderful *Star-Lord* to shame, particularly the scenes involving the mysterious Green Star which helps Ardeni master her powers. And in the end, Ardeni's solution to the galactic war is a simple but poetic one: having led the ruthless Doctor Varn and the Federation forces to the Jugla home-world, she uses her unimaginable mind power to render all the weapons on both sides useless before heading off into space with her friend Tilman and boyfriend Tarsh (disturbingly, a youth altered to look like her dead brother), leaving Varn and his Jugla counterpart Na-Rutha to either talk to each other or fight it out face to face! If only more superheroes had the common sense of Ardeni Lakam...

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GALAXY THE RULER OF THE JUGLA EMPIRE, THE COSMOL NA-RUTHA, HAD SIMILAR PROBLEMS.
STALEMATE! THE DISGUSTING HUMAN EMPIRE WILL NEVER FALL WHILE THAT MUDBALL EARTH STILL STANDS! AND THE - - DS PREVENT US GETTING WITHIN 100 LIGHT-YEARS OF IT!
O SUPREME COSMOL - THERE MAY BE A WAY. WE HAVE UNCOVERED TWO YOUNG HUMANS CAPABLE OF ABSORBING PRIMARY NEURAL IRRADIATION! THEY COULD BE THE KEY...
BUT A DANGEROUS RE - OUR CONTROL OVER THE NEW POWERS WILL BE LIMITED
BUT THERE IS NO OTHER WAY. DO IT! DO IT NOW!
BUT TRANS-GALACTIC DISTANCES REDUCE DANGERS TO INSIGNIFICANCE ON THE PROSPEROUS AND CULTURAL PLANET YULCRUGON, SETTLED BY GENERATIONS OF [illegible] WHO COULD HAVE SEEN A BILLION LIGHT
ARDENI! WHERE ARE YOU? LUNCH IS READY!
ARLEN AND ARDENI WERE TWIN BROTHER AND SISTER ENJOYING THEIR SUMMER VACATION FROM VULCRUGON UNIVERSITY
IF WE'RE NOT BACK HOME IN TEN MINUTES, OUR LUNCH GETS FED TO THE PROTO-PIGS!
HANG ON! I'M NEARLY READY!
THANK THE STARS WE'VE STILL GOT ANOTHER SIX WEEKS OF VACATION ARDENI. IT'S SO PEACE-FUL HERE!
THAT'S BAD NEWS ARLEN! I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO MOTHER'S FILLETED VREEN CUTLETS MARINATED IN OVER-RIPE SLURD JUICE!
BUT THAT PEACE WAS ABOUT TO BE RUDELY SHATTERED!
APPROACHING VULCRUGON. THOSE ARE THE HUMANS WE SEEK.
GOOD. FIRST WE PUT THEM INTO A STATE OF SHOCK
PREPARE TO LIVE AGAIN NA RUTHA. FAREWELL!
SHE IS LEAVING WITHOUT HARMING ME!
ARDENI RETURNED TO THE [illegible] FLEET
HAVE YOU DESTROYED THE COSMOL?
NO DOCTOR VARN MR TILMAN TARSH... I'M LEAVING NOW. COME WITH ME IF YOU WANT
I'LL COME WITH YOU
ME, TOO!
I'M DISAPPOINTED ARDENI. YOU MAY LACK THE NERVE TO DESTROY THE JUGLA BUT I'VE JUST GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS FOR THIS FLEET TO FINISH THE JOB
WHICH IS WHY I'VE JUST USED MY POWERS TO NEUTRALISE EVERY WEAPON IN THIS FLEET.
WHAAT!
SHE'S NEUTRALISED THE WORKS, PREPARABLY EVEN THE HAND ENERGISERS WON'T FUNCTION ANY MORE..
YOU AND NA RUTHA HAVE MUCH IN COMMON DR. VARN.
COME BACK! WITHOUT OUR WEAPONS THE JUGLA WILL DESTROY US!
NO. BECAUSE I DID THE SAME THING TO THE JUG. A WEAPONS YOU HAVEN'T GOT MUCH CHOICE NOW, DOCTOR VARN, AND NOR HAS NA RUTHA. YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO TALK TO EACH OTHER INSTEAD OF FIGHTING EACH OTHER. HAVE FUN!
THE END.
STARLORD MERGES WITH 2000 A.D. NEXT WEEK. ORDER IT NOW!

AAAAH! THE WATER POISON!
MY GOD! HE'S DEAD!
THE FILTHY RAIDERS! I'LL FIX 'EM
I SEEN WHAT'S THE BIG AAARGH!
THE THING SPAT IN ARCHIE'S FACE
IT'S DISINTEGRATING!
HAD IT!

(ABOVE): STELLAR ART FROM MIND WARS AND PLANET OF THE DAMNED

such as *Johnny Alpha: Strontium Dog*, with his co-bounty hunter Wulf, drawn by that breath of fresh air in UK comic book art, Carlos Ezquerra. Okay, yes, Ezquerra would go and pimp himself by doing Dredd in issues of *2000AD* but The Dog was his finest hour! The narrative was handled by one T.B. Grover, which turned out to be a cover for the writers John Wagner and Alan Grant. Greatness was assured.

If *Strontium Dog* was the crown, then *Ro-Busters* was the sceptre and the orb. *Ro-Busters* set a whole new tone in comic writing, sometimes laugh out loud funny, sometimes slap stick and sometimes bitingly satirical. The writer, Pat Mills, was clearly having a ball with the concept.

Time Quake was a bold and convincing take on time travel that was regulated by an organisation that recruited the lead character, James Blocker and used him as agent to move up and down the time line battling The Droon, aliens Hell-bent on taking over the universe. Written by Jack Adrian and drawn in that first issue by the supreme and dramatic Ian Kennedy.

Planet Of The Damned was a welcome punt at the whole Bermuda triangle mystery, which novelist Erich von Däniken had been mining since 1968's *Chariot Of The Gods*. Writer R E Wright was definitely tapping into a known vein of popular 70s speculation. It pre-dates the television series *Lost* by three decades too. A plane, caught in the Bermuda Triangle, crash lands in a world seemingly in another dimension. Get real TV land! Giant polar bears my arse! What you want are acid spitting, bipedal slag heaps. Now that was realism!

Which really only leaves the question: What were IPC playing at? Two science fiction titles? Wouldn't one just cannibalise the other's readership?

Which was exactly what happened.

However, science fiction, largely due to 1977s *Star Wars* movie, was on the up and defining it's own audience, with non science fiction fans attracted to *Star Wars* (largely due to its bargain basement space opera thematics). So there was a case for IPC's SF expansion. Where there are strange worlds and a cringing cantina scene, there's brass. As we like to say in Yorkshire.

Worse though, *Star-Lord* found itself launched into a deteriorating economic climate in the late 70s. Recession was beckoning and the UK was tumbling towards a unions and Labour Government confrontation that would become known as the Winter of Discontent. Unofficial strike action was spreading across the country as a reaction to the Government's pay-restraint policy. Black rubbish bags piled up in London's Leicester Square, as refuse collectors stop collecting, bodies went unburied and hospitals turned patients away as staff took industrial action.

Against this background IPC were, I suspect forced to cut costs and rather than do the right but expensive thing of merging *2000AD* with *Star-Lord*, the cheaper alternative was implemented; *Star-Lord* became a name under *2000AD*'s banner with prog 86. *Strontium Dog* and *Ro-Busters* survived the transition but the *Star-Lord* sub-title disappeared altogether when *2000AD* assimilated *Tornado* with prog 127.

It only leaves this writer to wonder, if things had been different and *Star-Lord* had taken over *2000AD*. Where would Tharg The Bloody Mighty be then I ask you? Down the local Job Centre, that's where!

Zarjaz that, Tharg. ●

Star-Lord:
18 May 1977 to 7 October 1978

While many of Gerry Anderson's creations made their debut on the small screen, Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons - to use its full title - was first mentioned on the front page of the 125th issue of TV21 in June 1967. Jamie Hailstone tells us all about it...

Captain Black Mars Expedition Lost! was the attention-grabbing headline, which echoed the events of the first television episode, which was broadcast in September the same year. Once again, TV21 was being used to fan the flames of the Supermarionation universe, although eagle-eyed readers will already have spotted the Angels in Lady Penelope's solo strip a few month's beforehand.

But Captain Scarlet and the mystery of the strange aliens would not be fully explained for several months and it was not until issue 141 that Anderson's indestructible hero finally made his first fully-fledged appearance.

If the Thunderbirds were the last word in family entertainment, then Captain Scarlet was Gerry Anderson at his darkest. The sci-fi and action adventure had alien possessions, cold war references and a body count to make James Cameron blush. The concept was so good that Anderson returned to it in 2005 and gave it a CGI makeover in what many consider to be his finest work.

Captain Scarlet's first story We Will Destroy Unity City was an epic that ran from issues 141 to 149. It was written by Angus P. Allan and drawn by TV21 stalwart Ron Embleton. As it was the first story to feature Captain Scarlet himself, there was a brief recap about how Captain Scarlet became indestructible. The tale had many highlights, including the cliffhanger from part six, which Scarlet's body is about to be burnt in a funeral pyre.

The creative team of Allan and Embleton were also responsible for the next story We Will Destroy The Observatory, which ran from issues 150 to 154. This five-part tale saw the Mysterons attempt to destroy the

ART BY MIKE NOBLE

Earth Observatory Network.

The third and last story by Allan and Embleton was We Will Destroy Earth's Communications, which ran from issues 155 to 157. This adventure starts in space, as specialists race to fix Satellite 4 and culminates with Scarlet being buried at sea in a lead coffin.

Artist Mike Noble took over the pencils and brushes for the fourth Captain Scarlet story Secret Mission, which ran from issues 158 to 160. In Secret Mission, Scarlet is in the country of Bereznik, which might not sound very impressive, but it's one hell of the Scrabble word!

There are no prizes for guessing what happens in the fifth Captain Scarlet story, which was in issues 161 to 163. In the first instalment of Blue Mysteronised!, Captain Blue does appear to have been taken over by the Martians, but don't worry folks as this all turns out to be a cunning ruse.

Colonel White goes missing at the beginning of the sixth Scarlet tale, which ran from issues 164 to 166. Mike Noble was still drawing the strip at this point, but the writer remains uncredited. While Keith Watson took over art duties for the seventh Scarlet tale World Power Plant Explosion, which ran from issues 167 to 169.

The plot behind Formicide, which ran from 170 to 171, lived on again when Anderson brought back Captain Scarlet as a CGI cartoon a few years ago. The comic strip and the cartoon episode Swarm both have Mysteron-possessed insects invade Spectrum's headquarters and overwhelm Lieutenant Green.

The original comic strip was written by Angus P. Allan and drawn by Don Harley and is notable for the first, and sadly only appearance, of the unfortunately-named Captain Buff, who heads up the local Spectrum office in India. I'm guessing he was at the back of the queue for Captain tags, presumably standing behind Captains Puce and Magnolia, respectively.

In The Deadly Sea, which appeared in the September 1968 TV Century 21 annual in 1968, Captain Black steals a new invention that causes water to instantly evaporate and disappear. The merits of inventing such a product are bit unclear. The scientific genius who came up with the idea reckons that it will revolutionise the draining of swamps, but anyone with a GCSE in Science will immediately twig that dropping one of these beauties in the ocean would be a very bad thing indeed...

The Deadly Sea also sees one of the few times that the writers use Captain Scarlet's invincibility. At one point, the good Captain is boiled alive, but survives. In some of the other strips, he deliberately crashes vehicles, knowing that he will survive. The story also has some serious jet pack action and they look much more impressive in comic format than they ever did on the silver screen.

The Banner Vine, which ran in issues 176 and 177 is easily the most underwhelming of all the stories featured here. Written by Scott Goodall and drawn by Mike Noble, it's remarkable for having no Mysteron threat, but the tale of a killer plant on the loose on a spaceship feels rushed and by-the-numbers.

It ends with Captain Scarlet crashing the spaceship into the sea, in a bid to kill the plant. You never see Scarlet survive, just Captain Blue readers that he's indestructible and he'll be fine. Well, that's all right then.

Stansted Airport has the starting point for the epic Leviathan, which ran for five issues from 185 to 189. It was scripted by Angus P. Allan and Scott Goodall, with art by Mike Noble, Don Harley & Frank Bellamy. While most Scarlet strips were spread over two issues, this was far longer and the creative team clearly made the most of the extra space.

During Leviathan, Cloudbase is attacked and Captain Scarlet is forced to crash land it in the sea, Captain

ART (ABOVE AND BELOW) BY MIKE NOBLE

Three spaceships have mysteriously crashed, and Mysteron activity is suspected. Scarlet and Blue blast off in a decoy ship from Venus. Suddenly...

Black is captured by Spectrum and forced to undergo an operation that may release him from Mysteron influence and Captain Scarlet becomes trapped on a Martian-controlled submarine.

The most bizarre Scarlet storyline award must surely go The Football King, which originally ran in uses 194 and 195. Comics historian Chris Bentley goes as far as to say that this marked 'the beginning of the end' for the Century 21 version of TV21 and helped to usher in a more football orientated era.

Written by Howard Elson and drawn by Mike Noble, The Football King, sees Scarlet protect an Arab King, who is just crazy about the beautiful game. Before you can cough 'Roy Of The Rovers', the indestructible super agent is forced to join Assam Wanderers in order to protect the King, and yes, you guessed it, Captain Scarlet ends up scoring the winning goal in the cup final!

It's never really explained why the Mysterons want to kill King Abdul El Krim Ahmed and Scarlet's final line about playing or the Spectrum team is cheesier than a truckload of Edam, but it's still a diverting enough read. The large number of panels devoted to football match feel like a try-out for the publications new direction.

The Beginning Of The End, which ran from issues 196 to 198 was a truly ambitious epic, which begs for the big screen treatment. Written by Howard Elson, with art by Jim Watson and Mike Noble, it starts off in a truly audacious manner with Captain Black saving Captain Scarlet's life and takes things from there.

Black is apparently no longer under Mysteron control and first instalment ends with their Martian base being destroyed and Spectrum disbanded. In case you were wondering what former evil agents do when they call it a day, Captain Black retires to a small cottage in Berkshire and takes up...cricket!

ART (TOP LEFT & BELOW): MIKE NOBLE
'EXPLOSION' (FAR LEFT): DON HARLEY
'DEATH FOR GREEN' (LEFT): KEITH WATSON

(OPPOSITE): VETERAN ARTISTS MIKE NOBLE, RON EMBLETON AND FRANK BELLAMY ALL SHOW THEIR TALENTS

Captain Scarlet and Captain Blue join the World Space Patrol, but it's not long before the Mysterons return and seize control of Captain Black once more. With Spectrum disbanded, the Earth quickly falls under Mysteron control and Captain Scarlet is forced to travel to Mars and threaten to destroy the Martian's remetabolism ray.

With a few notable exceptions - The Football King being one of them - Captain Scarlet's run in TV21 was a triumph. The writers could take the brilliant starting concept and run with it in a million different directions. In a world terrorized by invisible aliens, nothing was impossible and Captain Scarlet's invincibility was the ultimate get-out-of-jail card. It was little wonder that Anderson himself revisited it with a fantastic CGI remake a few years ago, although tragically very few people saw Gerry Anderson's New Captain Scarlet as it was buried on the Saturday morning programme Ministry of Mayhem.

Thunderbirds might be the show that everyone remembers, but Captain Scarlet was Gerry Anderson's finest hour and gave TV21 some of its most memorable comic strips. Spectrum is green.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN A BRITAIN LONG GONE, WE THRILLED TO THE EXPLOITS OF BOMBER BRADDOCK AND KING COBRA, LAUGHED WITH CHEEKY, SHINER AND THE SPARKY PEOPLE. THOSE STRIPS ARE GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN, AND THOSE GREAT COMICS AND THEIR CRAZY CHARACTERS ARE ALL HERE, AT ALBION BRITISH COMICS!

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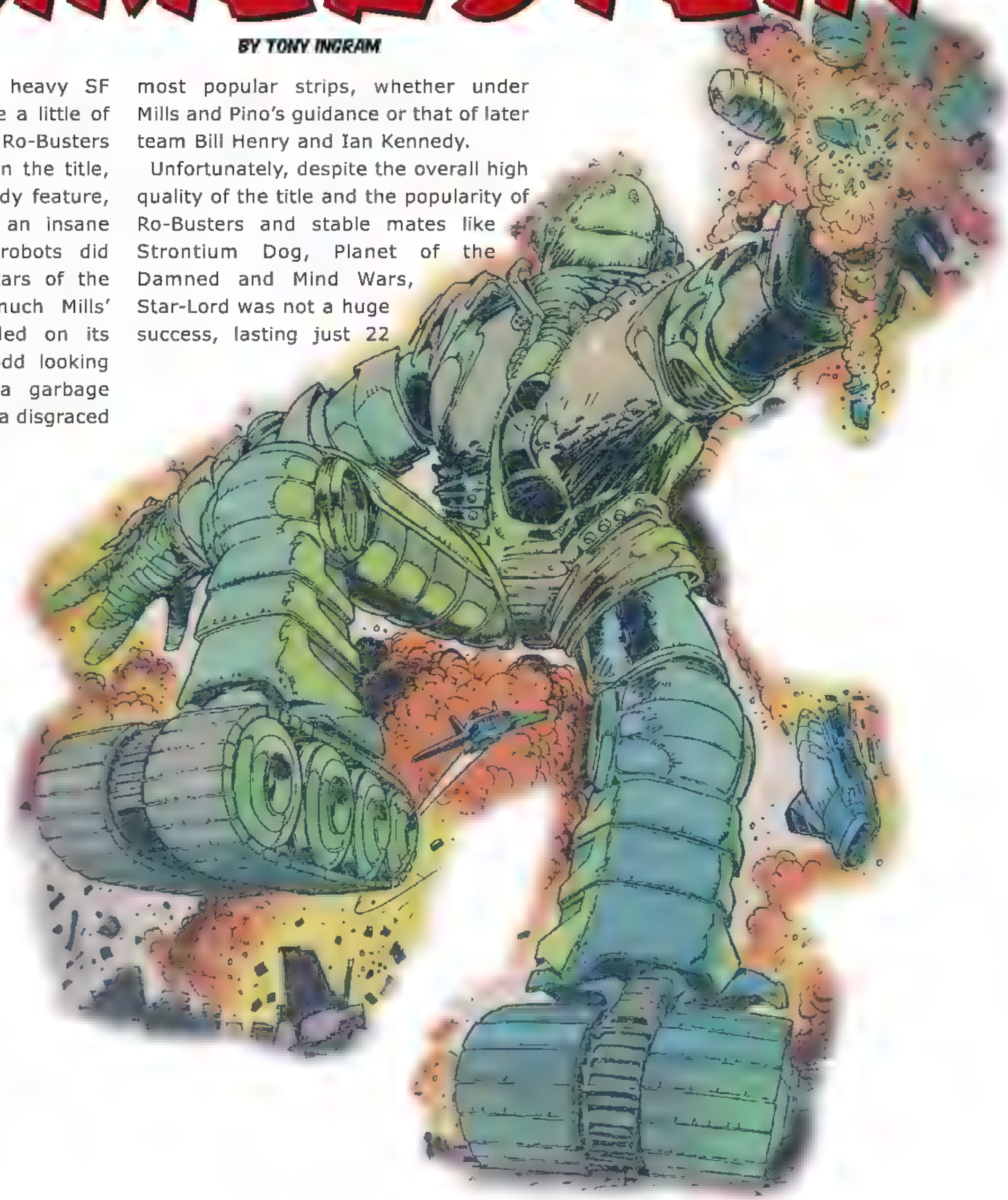
First introduced in Star-lord #1 (13 May 1978), 'Ro-Busters', created by Pat Mills and Spanish artist Carlos Pino, was the everyday story of a group of clapped out robots working as an International Rescue style 'disaster squad' for avaricious billionaire Howard Quartz. An idiosyncratic strip from the start, it was populated by a host of bizarre characters, including Quartz himself-known as "Mr 10%", because only ten per cent of him (his brain) was still human, floating in a kind of fishbowl on top of a robotic body! But the real stars of Ro-Busters were a pair of mismatched droids by the rather improbable names of Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein...

THE MECHANICAL MADNESS OF RO-JAWS AND HAMMERSTEIN

BY TONY INGRAM

Star-Lord was an action heavy SF comic which tried to provide a little of something for everyone, but Ro-Busters was unlike any other strip in the title, essentially Star-Lord's comedy feature, a riotous weekly romp in an insane mechanised world where robots did everything. The unlikely stars of the strip demonstrated how much Mills' robocentric society depended on its metal men: Ro-Jaws, an odd looking creation on wheels with a garbage compactor for a mouth, was a disgraced ex sewer robot, funny, mouthy and irreverent, his partner Hammerstein a redundant war droid with a hammer for a right hand and a stuffy, pompous attitude-effectively, a mechanised version of old soldier Foggy Dewhurst from Roy Clarke's long running TV sitcom 'Last of the Summer Wine'. Forever bickering (Hammerstein considered Ro-Jaws to be a lower class embarrassment to him, Ro-Jaws considered Hammerstein a stuck up "nerk") whether foiling a conspiracy in a futuristic hotel or saving a planeload of passengers from an insane robot pilot named Roger who believed he was fighting the Battle of Britain, the duo soon became firm favourites of the readers, and Ro-Busters one of Star-Lord's most popular strips, whether under Mills and Pino's guidance or that of later team Bill Henry and Ian Kennedy.

Unfortunately, despite the overall high quality of the title and the popularity of Ro-Busters and stable mates like Strontium Dog, Planet of the Damned and Mind Wars, Star-Lord was not a huge success, lasting just 22



issues (and one Summer Special) to 7 Oct 1978 (though Star-Lord Annuals were published from 1980-1982). Publishers IPC's policy was to 'merge' a cancelled title with one still running in order not to lose the dead title's readership, and so *Star-Lord* joined the pages of *2000AD* with issue (or 'programme' , as alien editor Tharg would have it)#86 on 14 Oct 1978. Only two of the Star-Lord strips transferred to *2000AD*; *Strontium Dog* and *Ro-Busters* (though *Timequake* would also be revived there later). Ro-Jaws, Hammerstein and their assorted friends and foes (most notably the psychotic medic Dr Feeleygood and the even more disturbed robot bulldozer named Mek Quake) fitted right in, the self proclaimed 'Galaxy's Greatest Comic' having just the right tone for their crazy misadventures.

But, comedy falls in and out of fashion with comics readers, and while *2000AD* has always had a strong element of humour, soon what the majority of readers were gravitating to were the more violent action strips. In an attempt to keep them interested, the Ro-Busters creators tried a couple of more experimental stories-one with none of the main cast involved, which centred on a giant robot 'pilot' (in the nautical sense) fighting to save a Northern port town from Howard Quartz's demolition droids, and, more significantly as it would turn out, one that was effectively a lengthy flashback to the unseen past of one of the characters;'Hammerstein's War Memoirs'. The readers liked that one, and the premise intrigued Pat Mills...

The Ro-Busters saga concluded in *2000AD* #115 with the last instalment of an unusually serious multi-part saga, 'The Fall and Rise of Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein'. Escaping the threat of disassembly when Quartz decides to shut Ro-Busters down, our wisecracking robot heroes escape with a few of their friends and flee offworld, last seen heading for the free robot world of Mekka, there to presumably live out

KILL! KILL GATORS! KILL SHERIFF - KILL EVERYTHING!
FLORIDA ALLIGATOR RANCH
DIE 'GATORS-DRIVERS-ALL GOING MAD! WHAT'S HAPPENING?
NEXT WEEK. I'M GOING AFTER THE GIANT GATOR!

their lives in peace, but this would not be the last we'd see of Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein.

Ro-Jaws was for awhile relegated to the role of host of the intermittent series of short stories 'Ro-Jaws' Robo-Tales', though these eventually faded away, and Mek Quake appears to have joined *2000AD*'s wholly fictitious robot staff, according to the many references in Tharg's editorials; he supposedly lived in the basement of Kings Reach Tower, doing his celebrated 'Big Jobs' (i.e. indescribable violence) on art and script droids who had committed the heinous crime of not turning in good enough stories. But Hammerstein would be given a new lease of life when, in 'prog' #119, just weeks after Ro-Busters ended, Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill brought us...the ABC Warriors!

Initially set in the closing days of the Volgan War (the earlier 'War Memoirs' story, featuring a much more primitive looking Hammerstein, was apparently set near the beginning), ABC Warriors starred a version of Hammerstein still in his prime (and with his 'original' head, the Ro-Busters version having looked completely different), here leading a crack squad of hand picked robot warriors designed to fight 'Atomic, Biological and Chemical warfare' against the nefarious Volgs (presumably, the same pseudo-Communist invaders Bill Savage had faced in the series 'Invasion'). The rest of Hammerstein's 'Meknificent Seven' were, in no particular order: Joe Pineapples, an enigmatic sniper who spoke in code; Mongrol, a robot paratrooper who had been rebuilt as a brain damaged hulk by the beautiful Lara, following an accident (Lara had been killed by the Volgs, inspiring Mongrol's parting words to those he despatched to the afterlife - "tell Lara I love her! Tell Lara I need her!") ; Deadlock, Grand Wizard of the Knights Martial, a sinister order of psychic robot monks; Blackblood, a treacherous, sadistic Volgan robot General reprogrammed to serve with the Warriors against his will; the bizarre Happy shrapnel, a robot cast in the image of an old West frontiersman complete with sculpted metal beard and cowboy hat (Why? Who knows...) and finally, the supposedly indestructible robot Steelhorn, whose unique makeup meant that he survived being smelted down by his treacherous human

THE ABC WARRIORS!
THOSE SWINE DESTROY EVERYTHING!
NOBODY SAID THE 'A' IS ODE FOR ANGELS VOLGS!
THE ENEMY IS STILL THE VOLGANS— BUT NOW WE'RE WINNING WHY? 'COS WE'RE BETTER THAN THEM!
VOLGOW MUST BURN NG... BUT YOU WILL SUFFER FOR THE ABC WARRIORS!
MEET THE GANG... YOU KNOW ME ALREADY... SERGEANT HAMMERSTEIN... I'M THE ONE WITH THE HAMMER!
KRANG!
OLD RED EYES MUNSEN.
SEEMS THE VOLGS KNOW ME TOO!
THAT'S JOE PINEAPPLES USING THE "BALL" BAZOOKA. JOE DON'T TALK MUCH...
N5!
HE'S GOT THE BAZOOKA DO THE TALKING.
DEBRIS.
HAPPY SHRAPNEL WITH THE KOLT 45 HE BORROWED FROM A VOLG GENERAL
ABOUT- BZZZ!- TIME, GOT A NEW SUIT OF BZZZ! ARMOUR.
THINKING HUMANS! WE ROBOTS RULED THE WORLD AND THE WORLD SPITS IN OUR FACE!
HE'S GONE BERSERK!
I STORMED OUT.. I HAD TO GET AWAY FROM THE HORROR. BUT OUTSIDE
WHAT.. WHAT'S THAT.. MESS?
IT—IT SEEMS TO KNOW ME TH THERE'S ONLY ONE ROBOT WHO COULD MAYBE HAVE SURVIVED THE FURNACE. STEELHORN... IS IS THAT YOU?
I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT.. ONCE IT WAS STEELHORN BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE.. AND NOW IT'S... A MESS! BUT.. WHY IS IT SLITHERING UP MY GUN BARREL?
OF COURSE. IT'S GOT TO KEEP WARM.. IF IT CONGEALS IT CAN'T MOVE! EASY STEELHORN.. I'LL HELP SCRAPE YOU OFF THE FLOOR!

(ABOVE): ART BY KEVIN O'NEILL

superiors and became a crazed, sentient molten Mess-which didn't help his temperament! They were a strange bunch, really.

Over the next few weeks, the ABC Warriors fought the Volgs to a standstill and then, the war over, were sent to Mars to help human colonists tame the red planet. Though the Warriors strip was never as overtly humorous as Ro-Busters, it still had its share of craziness, as the intrepid tin soldiers took on mutated apes dressed as Teddy Boys, a schizophrenic giant robot named Georgie, and various other unlikely threats. Their story was wrapped up rather suddenly in prog #139, though, as *2000AD* needed the space for new adventures of the VC's and Harry Harrison's *Stainless Steel Rat*.

For the next few years, Ro-Jaws, Hammerstein and the rest were in limbo, seen only in the odd Ro-Busters or ABC Warriors tale in various *2000AD* annuals. About the best of these were

MISS SWEET, THE TEACHER WHOSE CLASS OF KIDS HAD BEEN MURDERED BY BLACKBOARD, LOCKED HORRIFIED!
IT—IT'S A NIGHTMARE! YOU LOOK AS THOUGH YOU'RE ALL ENJOYING YOURSELVES!
YOU GOT IT, MISS SWEET! ABC WARRIORS ARE PROGRAMMED TO LIKE COMBAT-ACTION!

probably the 1981 text story'Escape From Volgow', Alan Moore's wonderful 'Red Planet Blues' from the 1985 Annual, in which a pensive Hammerstein discovers traces of native life on Mars and has to order his squad to eliminate it, and Ro-busters flashback tale'Old Red Eyes is Back' in the 1984 Annual, in which a bang on the head reawakens Hammerstein's wartime memories (curiously, his persona seemed to change depending on which head he was wearing, like a kind of high-tech Worzel Gummidge-the Ro-Buster's version was pompous but more fun, the warriors version serious and stoic) and Ro-Jaws has to call in his old army buddy Joe Pineapples to stop him running amok with a well placed bullet before the military can blow him up.

In *2000AD* #387, though-four and a half years after the Warriors' last regular outing-the droids returned to action in a very different strip, again by Mills and O'Neill, the bizarre 'Nemesis the Warlock'.

Nemesis, a strip distinguished by the fact that for once, the humans were quite definitely the bad guys, was about a non humanoid alien revolutionary fighting a kind of exaggerated version of the Spanish Inquisition in a far flung future. It had been around, on and off, since prog #167, and had been a regular feature since #222 but, though a robotic siege engine called Mek Quake (visually quite different from the earlier version) had been seen in Nemesis book III, it wasn't until book IV, 'The Gothic Empire' (set on an alien world that had modelled itself on Earth's Victorian age) that it was confirmed that Nemesis's universe was the future of the one seen in Ro-Busters as Nemesis checks into a hotel where Ro-Jaws is working as a valet. The readers were surprised, to say the least-by now, Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein were all but forgotten! In the next episode though, a battered and clearly aged Hammerstein was shown fighting a war on a neighbouring planet, where Mek Quake (now confirmed as the same robot, but in a new body) was also deployed. Unfortunately, they were both fighting on the side of the oppressors...

Hammerstein, naturally, was soon converted to the cause of the nominal good guys and reunited with his ABC Warriors, who Nemesis tracked down in various unlikely locations; Blackblood had reinvented himself as businessman Bunyon Snipe, Mongrol was in a circus and Joe Pineapples an undercover cop on Mekka (though he had at least learned English). Happy Shrapnel was long since dead (apparently, he was just too ridiculous to bring back) and the Mess long since lost, while Deadlock had supposedly merged with his god, Khaos-or Nemesis, to us! The Warriors, their ranks padded out by various short lived new members, became regular supporting characters in the Nemesis strip and eventually (prog #555) were awarded their own series once more, artist Simon Bisley providing a new and different take on the characters. They've been recurring characters ever since, and along the way both Deadlock and the long forgotten Steelhorn have resurfaced, though Ro-Jaws seems to have gotten lost somewhere. Sad though that is, it's perhaps for the best since the Ro-Jaws of the '80's/90's ABC Warriors strip was not really the same chirpy, fun character first introduced in Ro-Busters in 1978, anymore than Hammerstein is now the bumbling, loveable figure he once was. As other strips in *2000AD* have rediscovered their sense of humour, Mills seems to have taken the ABC Warriors down darker paths. Still, Hammerstein is still around almost thirty years after he and his grubby associate first invaded the pages of *2000AD*. Not bad, for a once redundant pile of scrap metal... ●

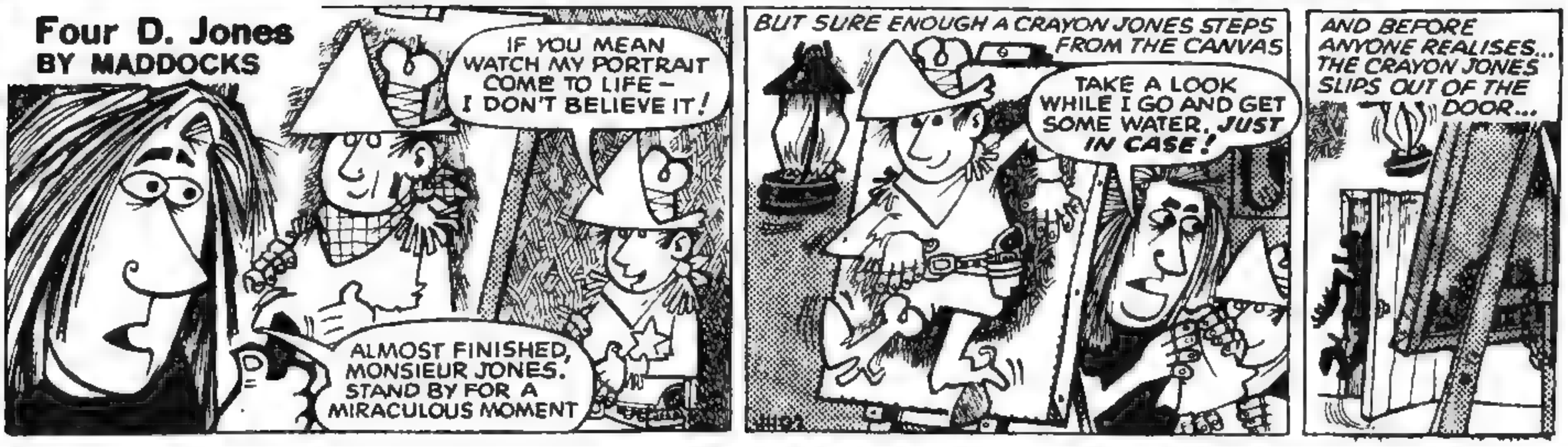
PETER MADDOCKS'

FOUR D JONES

Peter Maddocks was born in Birmingham on 1 April 1928. In 1939 he won a scholarship to the Moseley School of Art in Birmingham and later became a leading cartoonist, contributing to many of the UK's leading Daily and Sunday newspapers in a distinguished career. Among his creations he can boast *The Family Ness*, *Penny Crayon* and *Jimbo and the Jet Set* for the BBC.

Retired and now living in southern Spain, Peter has put down his pencil in favour of a paint brush and canvas. Presented here is another of his creations 'Four D Jones', which ran from 1955 to 1965 in the *Daily Express*.

For more of Peter's current work check out his website: http://www.petermaddocks.com


Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS
IF YOU MEAN WATCH MY PORTRAIT COME TO LIFE – I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
ALMOST FINISHED, MONSIEUR JONES. STAND BY FOR A MIRACULOUS MOMENT
BUT SURE ENOUGH A CRAYON JONES STEPS FROM THE CANVAS
TAKE A LOOK WHILE I GO AND GET SOME WATER. JUST IN CASE!
AND BEFORE ANYONE REALISES... THE CRAYON JONES SLIPS OUT OF THE DOOR...

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS
THE CRAYON DRAWING OF FOUR D. JONES BY IKABOD COMES TO LIFE...
VINCENT MISTAKES THE DRAWING FOR THE REAL JONES
I SAY, IF YOU'RE GOING OUT, SHOULD YOU NOT TAKE YOUR HOOP WITH YOU?
TAKE IT WITH YOU BOY...
...I SHOULD HATE IT TO GET LOST
MEANWHILE, IKABOD INVITES JONES TO LOOK AT HIS CRAYON PORTRAIT
TAKE A LOOK. HAVE I NOT GOT GENIUS?
EGAD! GONE!

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS
THE PORTRAIT OF JONES HAS DONE A BUNK, LEAVING JONES TO STUDY A BLANK CANVAS
NOTHING? YOU'RE KIDDING OF COURSE
ARE YOU TRYIN' TO BE FUNNY, IKABOD? THERE'S NOTHING HERE!
SACRE BLEU! GONE!
I'VE DONE IT AGAIN, BUT WHERE DID IT GO TO?
YOU MEAN I'VE COME TO LIFE?
I SAY, VINCENT, DEAR FELLOW, DID YOU SEE A FOUR D. JONES GO BY HERE?
YES, HE WENT OUT INTO THE STREET – WHY?

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

WHAT! IKABOD, HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO YOUR TRICKS AGAIN?

IT WAS A DRAWING OF ME THAT WENT PAST YOU, MATE

J 1105

YES, MATE! AND WHERE'S MY HOOP? ON NO! DON'T TELL ME THAT IDIOT LIFE-LIKE DRAWING TOOK IT?

IKABOD, YOU AND I HAVE GOT TO FIND THAT LIFE-DRAWING OF ME. BUT PRONTO. HE'S GOT MY HOOP

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

COME ON IKABOD WE'VE GOT TO FIND THAT FAKE JONES BEFORE HE USES MY HOOP

J 1106

BUT THE CRAYON DRAWING OF JONES HAS OTHER IDEAS...

CAFÉ NAUGHTY, EH! RIGHT UP MY STREET

CAFE N'AUGHTY

GIRLS GIRLS

CRAYON JONES ENTERS THE SINFUL CAFÉ NAUGHTY...

OH BOY, OH BOY, WINE, WOMEN AND CHA CHA... THREE SHEETS IN THE WIND, MATE

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

AS SOON AS YOU SEE THE FAKE JONES, CHUCK WATER AT HIM

J 1107

HOWEVER, WATER IS FURTHEST FROM THE CRAYON JONES'S MIND AT THAT VERY MOMENT

BARTENDER, IF YOU KNOW HOW TO MIX A MAN'S DRINK, MIX ME ONE

...AND DRINKS ALL ROUND ON FOUR D JONES

'THEY SEEK HIM HERE - THEY SEEK HIM THERE'

I DON'T SEE HIM

BUT HE MUST BE AROUND SOME-WHERE

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

OKAY

WE MUST SPLIT IT UP, YOU GO THAT WAY

J 1108

MEANWHILE THE CRAYON JONES IS REALLY LIVING IT UP...

OH YOU LIVING DOLL!

I MUST FIND THAT IDIOT, OR I'M STUCK HOOPLESS

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

THE SEARCH FOR THE FAKE JONES GOES ON

WHERE THE BLAZES CAN HE BE?

THE CRAYON JONES IS THE TOAST OF THE SINFUL CAFE NAUGHTY

WHILE THE REAL JONES IS SUFFERING GREAT SUFFERS

GOT YOU, YOU FIEND!

YOU GREAT NIT! IT'S ME, THE REAL ONE

OH HAPPY DAYS

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

JONES IS SET UPON BY THE BARMAN OF THE CAFE NAUGHTY AND IS LOCKED IN THE KITCHEN

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY OUT

HEY! NOW WHAT ARE YOU UP TO? COME ON, GET ME OUT OF HERE

I NEVER WANT TO SEE ANOTHER WINE GLASS AGAIN LET ALONE ANOTHER FOUR D. JONES

IKABOD SETS TO WORK DRAWING ON THE WALL OF THE CAFE NAUGHTY

YET ANOTHER JONES WILL CREATE CONFUSION AND THE REAL IDIOT CAN ESCAPE

ONCE AGAIN AN IKABOD DRAWING COMES TO LIFE

SPLENDID, NOW TO GIVE MY CREATION INSTRUCTIONS

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

SO AS NOT TO CONFUSE YOU LOOKERS IN, IKABOD HAS DRAWN YET ANOTHER JONES, SO WE NOW HAVE THREE...

NOW MY CRAYON FRIEND GO AROUND TO THE ENTRANCE AND WALK INTO THE CAFE

OH YES, I WILL, I COULD DO WITH A GLASS OF MILK

THE REAL JONES SUFFERS ON...

WHAT THE BLAZES IS THAT CRAYON MANIAC UP TO? HEY! IKABOD!

QUIET YOU FOOL, HIDE UNDER THE KITCHEN TABLE

ENTER CRAYON JONES Nº 2

CAFE NAUGHTY ENTRANCE

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

I DID, HE'S WASHING WINE GLASSES - HEY, HE GOT OUT

HEY, BARMAN, I THOUGHT YOU PUT THAT IDIOT IN THE KITCHEN

ENTER CRAYON JONES Nº 2

EXCUSE ME, COULD YOU OBLIGE ME WITH A GLASS OF MILK?

THE BARMAN IS FURIOUS. MISTAKING THE CRAYON JONES FOR THE REAL JONES THAT HE MISTOOK FOR THE REAL JONES...

GET BACK INTO THE KITCHEN, MATE, UNTIL YOU HAVE PAID YOUR DEBT

KITCHEN

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

THE SECOND CRAYON DRAWING OF JONES IS SET UPON BY THE ANGRY BARMAN...

BACK! YOU GO MATE!

KITCHEN

WHEN I SAY WASH GLASSES IN THE KITCHEN I MEAN IT!

HE'S CRACKERS!

THE REAL JONES IS HIDING IN THE KITCHEN UNDER THE TABLE AS INSTRUCTED BY IKABOD...

WHAT'S IKABOD UP TO?

RIGHT, WHEN THE BARMAN TURNS HIS BACK—YOU SCARPER!

RIGHT!

THE BARMAN ENTERS THE KITCHEN AND PLANTS THE BEWILDERED FAKE JONES AT THE SINK, AND THE REAL JONES TIPTOES OUT.

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

NOW THEN, GET THEM GLASSES WASHED AND THIS TIME STAY PUT UNTIL YOU'RE DONE

SO THAT'S IT, ANOTHER DRAWING OF ME!

KITCHEN

SCARPER IKABOD! WHILE THE GOING IS GOOD.

REALLY MY NERVES WILL BE SHOCKINGLY SHATTERED!

I, I THINK WE ARE SAFE.

YOU'RE OVERDOING YOURSELF MATE.

I LIKE THAT! IT'S YOU THAT'S OVER DOING ME WITH ALL THOSE DRAWINGS.

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

IKABOD MISTAKES THE REAL JONES FOR THE FAKE ONE AND SOAKS HIM WITH A BUCKET OF WATER

YOU NIT!

TO ERR IS HUMAN

DON'T QUOTE AT ME, MATE. NOW GO LOOK AGAIN

THE FAKE JONES LEAVES THE CAFÉ NAUGHTY FULL OF THE JOYS OF SPRING

CAFÉ NAUGHTY
OPEN ALL NITE.

YOU'RE A LIVING DOLL!

YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET, BABE

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

THE FAKE JONES...

MAKES AN EXIT INTO THE NIGHT...

...UNSEEN BY THE BARMAN OF THE CAFÉ NAUGHTY

HEY!

THAT COWBOY HAS LEFT WITHOUT PAYING HIS BILL

AS THE BARMAN LEAVES... SO THE REAL JONES ENTERS THE CAFE NAUGHTY...

CAFÉ NAUGHTY
OPEN ALL NITE.

I'LL MAKE ENQUIRIES IN HERE

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

THE BARMAN OF THE CAFE NAUGHTY IS WORRIED

THAT COWBOY AIN'T PAID HIS BILL

AND OUTSIDE THE CAFE NAUGHTY ARE JONES AND IKABOD

CAFÉ NAUGHTY

LOOKING FOR ME? I'M AFRAID YOU MUST BE MISTAKEN

AS JONES ENTERS THE CAFE...

OOF

...HE COLLIDES WITH THE BARMAN - WHOSE TEMPER IS ALREADY AT BOILING-POINT

YOU GREAT NIT OF A CLUMSY OAF! WHY DON'T YOU LOOK... HEY! IT'S YOU!

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

JONES AND THE BARMAN COLLIDE AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE CAFE NAUGHTY

IT'S YOU! YOU CLUMSY OAF. I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU

LOOKING FOR ME? I'M AFRAID YOU MUST BE MISTAKEN

DENY ME WOULD YOU? I'LL SOON PUT YOU RIGHT, MATE

SEE THOSE DIRTY WINE GLASSES? WASH, POLISH AND STACK 'EM

AND, IN FUTURE, DON'T CALL FOR DRINKS YOU CAN'T PAY FOR

KITCHEN

Four D. Jones
BY MADDOCKS

THAT FAKE JONES MUST HAVE BEEN HERE AND A FINE MESS HE'S LET ME IN FOR, TOO

IKABOD, TIRED OF WAITING FOR JONES - PEERS INTO THE KITCHEN

GOOD GRIEF! WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THERE?

I'VE BEEN LUMBERED WITH WORKING OFF YOUR MATE'S UNPAID BILLS, MATE

NOW GET ME OUT OF HERE

WELL, THERE'S ONLY ONE THING I CAN DO

TO BE CONTINUED...

PHOTO FINISH!

Ian Wheeler *takes a not so 'negative' look at photo comics of the 80s...*

In early 1982, IPC Magazines re-launched *Eagle*, the classic British comic which had had such a huge impact in the 1950s and 60s and which had made the character of Dan Dare a household name. The new version, edited by David Hunt and overseen by Group Editor Barrie Tomlinson and executive Gil Page, would combine old and new elements. Dan himself would return but many of the new stories would be told not in the form of artwork but as 'photo-stories' with photographers taking over from the artists to present an exciting new way of depicting adventures on the printed page. Photo-stories had already appeared in girls comics such as *Jackie* but for boys' titles they were an innovative development.

Amongst the characters debuting as photo-strips in issue one of the new *Eagle* was a character who would go on to become a legend of British comics. *Doomlord* was an alien sent from the planet Nox to judge mankind and decide whether the human race was worthy of continued survival. Created by John Wagner (although mainly written by Alan Grant) the story was an instant classic and alongside Dan Dare was hugely popular with the publication's readers. Wearing a mask and robes sourced from London theatrical shops, Doomlord made a very convincing alien. The character had the ability to morph into the shape of his human victims and the transformation effects were achieved very convincingly given the lack of computer technology available at the time - a tribute to photographer Gary Compton and the design team. Models of spaceships were occasionally used and the overall quality of the story was very high. The hero of the piece, reporter

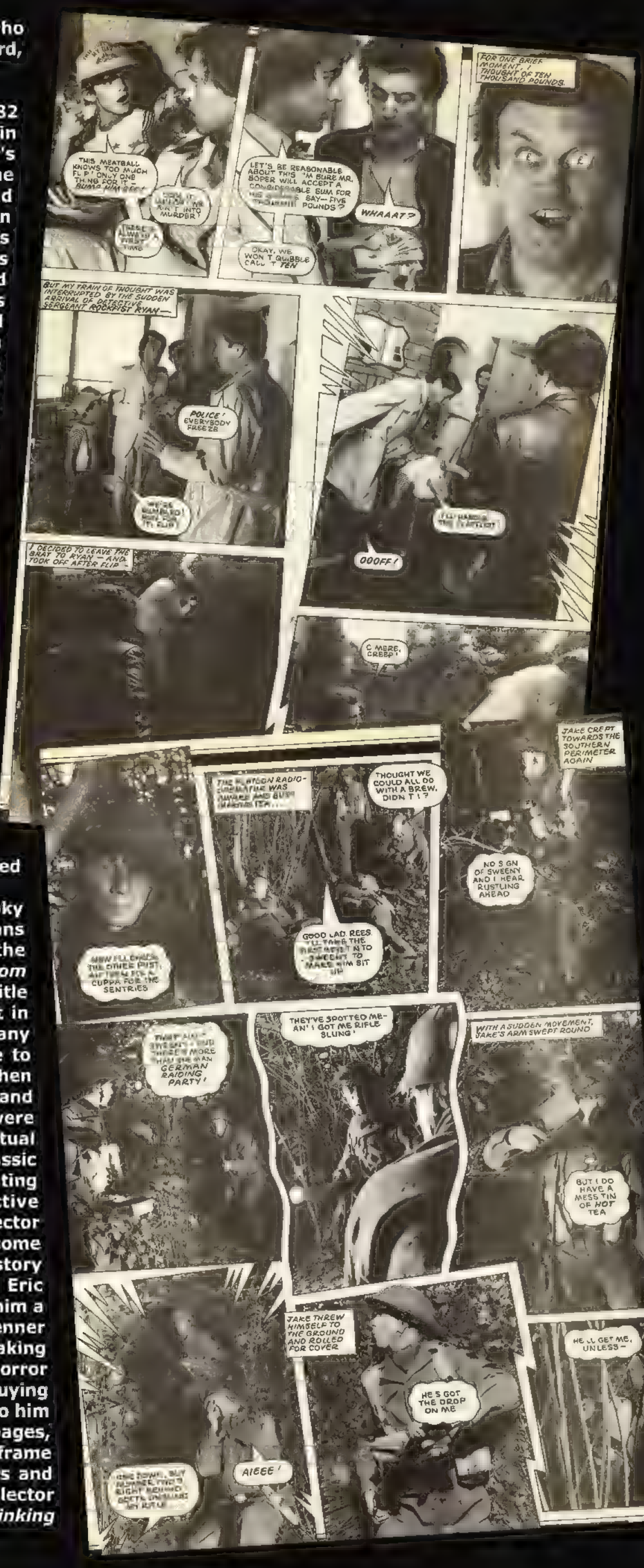
Howard Harvey of the Cranbridge Argus who vowed to track down and defeat Doomlord, became an icon of early 80s comics.

The first run of *Doomlord* ended in June 1982 and was followed by a sequel, *Doomlord II*, in August of that year; such was the character's popularity. Howard Harvey had defeated the first Doomlord (Doomlord Zyn) but a second 'Servitor of Nox' (Doomlord Vek) arrived on Earth to find out what had happened to his predecessor. He disguised himself as commercial traveller Eric Plumrose and lodged at the boarding house of Mrs Souster, who was herself to prove to be a very long-running and popular character. Vek was a friendlier alien than his predecessor and was to judge mankind worthy of survival. That didn't stop a third Doomlord, Zom, trying to put paid to his plans when *Doomlord III* rolled along.

Another early photo-strip in *Eagle* was the football-orientated *Thunderbolt and Smokey*. This story concerned two schoolboys–Colin 'Thunderbolt' Dexter and Leo 'Smokey' Beckles–as they tried to rid their school under-14s football team of its 'dead-loss' image. Featuring an ethnic character in one of the title roles, this was to prove to be a socially-realistic and well-written adventure.

Another popular character was *Sgt Streetwise*, an undercover detective with a boss called Superintendent Taggart! Written by Gerry Finley-Day, this was a hard-hitting and contemporary story. He would be followed by a similar character, a private detective called *Joe Soap*, who would prove to be bungling and ineffective–like Columbo but not as clever. The more things went wrong for Soap (full name Joseph Soaper) the more readers loved him.

The Collector was a very sinister and spooky story and featured many themes familiar to fans of classic British horror films. Indeed, the concept and setup were similar to the film *From Beyond the Grave* with the Collector of the title playing a similar role to Peter Cushing's part in that production. The Collector owned many mysterious objects each of which had a tale to tell. He would show us the object and then narrate the story behind it. The opening and closing scenes with the Collector himself were drawn (normally by Pat Wright) and the actual stories were depicted in photos. Many classic horror themes were utilised including man-eating plants and devil dolls. One very effective instalment was *Profits of Doom* (the Collector drawn this time by Rex Archer who turned in some wonderfully atmospheric drawings). The story featured a dishonest comic shop owner, Eric Smuggs, who conned a customer into selling him a comic worth thousands of pounds for only a tenner –the very rare *Tomb of Torture* issue 27. Taking the comic home to read, Eric realised to his horror that the story featured scenes of himself buying the comic and the events that had happened to him that day. A hideous tentacle came out of the pages, dragging Eric into the story, and the final frame showed him surrounded by hideous monsters and ghoulies! Another particularly innovative Collector story came in the form of *The Incredible Shrinking*


THIS MEATBALL KNOWS TOO MUCH FLIP! ONLY ONE THING FOR IT – BUMP HIM OFF!
HEH, IT WASN'T MY AIN'T INTO MURDER!
LET'S BE REASONABLE ABOUT THIS 'M SURE MR. BOPER WILL ACCEPT A CONSIDERABLE SUM FOR HIS SAY– FIVE POUNDS?
WHAAAT?
FOR ONE BRIEF MOMENT, I THOUGHT OF TEN THOUSAND POUNDS.
OKAY, WE WON'T QUIBBLE CALL IT TEN
BUT MY TRAIN OF THOUGHT WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE SUDDEN ARRIVAL OF DETECTIVE SERGEANT ROCKFIST RYAN—
POLICE! EVERYBODY FREEZE
I DECIDED TO LEAVE THE BRAT TO RYAN — AND TOOK OFF AFTER FLIP —
OOOFF!
C MERE, CREEP!
THE NATOON RADIO-DIFFUSION WAS
THOUGHT WE COULD ALL DO WITH A BREW, DIDN'T I?
JAKE CREPT TOWARDS THE SOUTHERN PERIMETER AGAIN
NO SIGN OF SWEENY AND I HEAR RUSTLING AHEAD
GOOD LAD. REES. I'LL TAKE THE FIRST WATCH TO ALLOW SWEENY TO MAKE HIMSELF SIT UP.
NOW I'LL CHANGE THE OTHER POST, AFTER I'VE A CUPPA FOR THE SENTRIES
THAT AIN'T SWEENY – THERE'S MORE THAN ONE MAN GERMAN RAIDING PARTY!
THEY'VE SPOTTED ME– AN' I GOT ME RIFLE SLUNG!
WITH A SUDDEN MOVEMENT, JAKE'S ARM SWEPT ROUND
BUT I DO HAVE A MESS TIN OF HOT TEA
JAKE THREW HIMSELF TO THE GROUND AND ROLLED FOR COVER
HE'S GOT THE DROP ON ME
HE'LL GET ME, UNLESS–
AIEEE!

Sam in which Eagle readers and their parents who had taken part in a competition were able to participate in the narrative themselves!

Further photo-stories in Eagle included a Western called Saddle Tramp, Jake's Platoon (a World War Two story set in Normandy following D-Day) and another war-time saga called The House of Correction. These historical tales were handled just as well as more contemporary stories with great attention given to costumes and weapons. More modern adventures included The Invisible Boy and Manix, the latter of which featured a robot secret agent described as 'the ultimate weapon! The most dangerous man in the world!' Manix was to prove very popular and the robot would be portrayed by no fewer than three actors - changing the droid's face was no problem for modern technology! There was also The Adventures of Fred, a short newspaper-style strip featuring a Mr Bean-type character portrayed by Eagle Group Editor Barrie Tomlinson, who also wrote the story.

Eagle experimented with 3D in February and March 1983. Whilst it was not feasible to do a full photo-story in 3D, some images from the photostories were given the 3D treatment allowing Doomlord to come alive on the printed page!

It is worth mentioning that the photo-strips were backed up by photo-based features including Personality Plus which profiled popular celebrities of the day such as Lewis Collins.

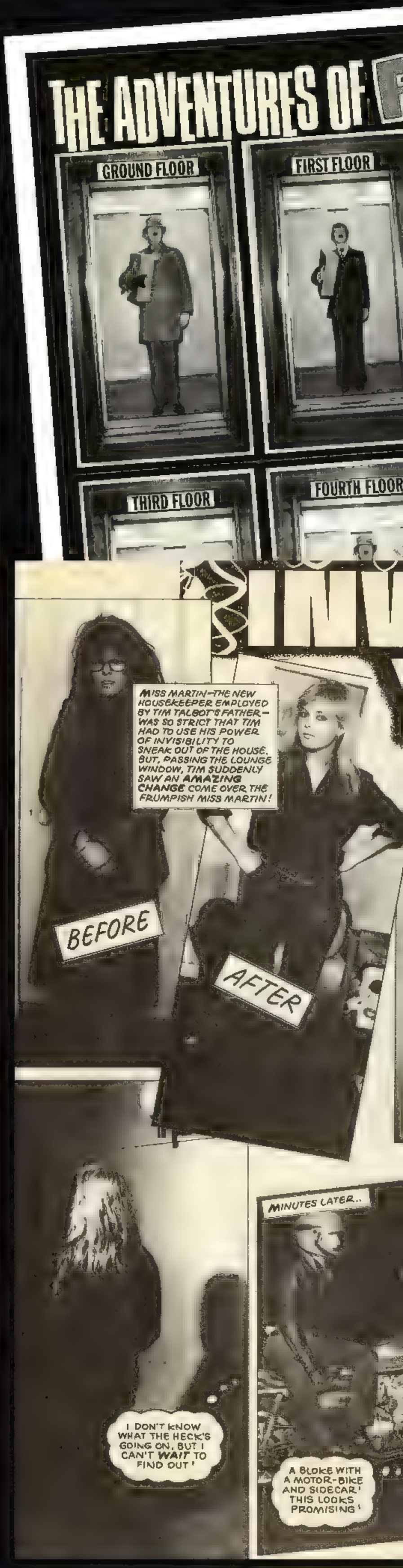
Eagle also had annuals and summer specials of course and the photo-stories were included in those too. Doomlord was absent from the first annual published in 1982 (cover dated 1983) - the tight continuity of the weekly story making a one-off instalment difficult - but The Collector and Thunderbolt and Smokey were there. The photo-stories returned for the following year's volume but were absent from 1985 to 1987. They came back in 1988 with a one-off story called The Secret of Fort Hattersley - nothing to do with the Labour politician of the same name but a tale of vampires and nasty goings-on on a housing estate!

In September 1983, a big change occurred. The new Eagle, with its high-quality paper and extensive features, was proving too expensive to produce and it was decided that the comic would be printed on the cheaper 'newsprint' paper like its sister publications 2000AD and Battle. In an interview with fanzine Eagle Flies Again, Eagle Editor David Hunt explained the thinking behind the change:

'...the team that put the new Eagle to bed was a large one... the photo-stories were very labour intensive, so from the outset Eagle required a healthy circulation just to meet its staffing costs... circulation figures slowly declined until eventually it became impossible to sustain a publication with the printing and staffing overheads that Eagle had.'

So the photo-stories had to go. Not only were they too expensive to make but they wouldn't have reproduced well enough on the cheaper paper anyway. Doomlord became a conventional strip drawn by an artist and would run for many more years, its best days still to come. In fact, artwork allowed the writer Alan Grant to come up with all sorts of exiting new ideas and show us new planets and creatures - something a photo-strip could never have achieved (Grant would however comment in an interview that his preference was for the story to be told in photo-strip, although he did greatly admire Eric Bradbury's artwork). Manix made the same transition but the change was less smooth for a story called Walk or Die (about kids surviving in the wilderness after a plane crash) as it changed from photo-strip to artwork mid-story, whereas Manix and Doomlord began new adventures.

Overall the photo-stories proved to be a very successful experiment and it was the prohibitive cost of producing them rather than lack of reader interest which resulted in their downfall. Characters such as Doomlord and Manix remain popular even today. New technology allows photographic elements to be incorporated into traditional comic strips (such as the sadly discontinued Scorer football strip form the Mirror newspaper) so perhaps it is not out of the question that the photostrip might itself one day enjoy a revival. In the meantime, the fact that they continue to be enjoyed is a testimony to the creative talent of men like Barrie Tomlinson, David Hunt and the many writers and photographers who worked on these highly memorable stories. ●


THE ADVENTURES OF
GROUND FLOOR
FIRST FLOOR
THIRD FLOOR
FOURTH FLOOR
MISS MARTIN—THE NEW HOUSEKEEPER EMPLOYED BY TIM TALBOT'S FATHER—WAS SO STRICT THAT TIM HAD TO USE HIS POWER OF INVISIBILITY TO SNEAK OUT OF THE HOUSE. BUT, PASSING THE LOUNGE WINDOW, TIM SUDDENLY SAW AN AMAZING CHANGE COME OVER THE FRUMPISH MISS MARTIN!
BEFORE
AFTER
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HECK'S GOING ON, BUT I CAN'T WAIT TO FIND OUT!
MINUTES LATER...
A BLOKE WITH A MOTOR-BIKE AND SIDECAR! THIS LOOKS PROMISING!

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EAGLE

26th June, 1982
EVERY MONDAY
20p

His job was dirty and so was the money he

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SADDLE TRAMP!

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Stamp Hinges (mounts).
...accumule of the World's ...p and its story (The ...d now to be worth half a ...ds!)
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...ISIBLE BOY

ALL THIS ... BEEN WEA... DISGUISE ... MISS MA... LIKE SOME... OF A FAS...

I HOPE THEY DON'T PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER, THEY DON'T KNOW I'M AN *UNDER-COVER COP*, AND THAT'S THE WAY IT'S GOT TO STAY!

I'D COME RUNNING FOR YOU ANY TIME, FLOD. NOW LET'S GET MOVING.

AREN'T WE GOING TO WAIT FOR THE OTHERS? WE'LL NEED HELP.

INSIDE A MINUTE

EAST STREET ALLEY!

NOT THE USUAL SORT OF ALLEY FOR SOME ONE WHO'S *STREET-WISE* — BUT HERE GOES

THEY'VE GOT A SHOOTER, AND —

SO, SEE' THE KAID'S IN PROGRESS — *RIGHT NOW!*

WOTCHA PC PLOD YOU RAISE THE ALARM?

SGT. WISE! HOW THE HECK I'VE ONLY JUST COME OFF THE PHONE'

AT THE PAY BOOTH

GUN!

JUST KEEP THE NOISE DOWN, DARLIN' PUT THE MONEY IN TH'S BAG AND NOBODY'LL GET HURT

COME ON' WE'VE GOT THE CASH — LET'S SCARPER'

YEAH, I'M COMING — JUST LETTING THIS LITTLE LADY KNOW WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF SHE LETS OFF THE ALARM TOO SOON

IT WENT LIKE A DREAM, TERRY

I KNEW IT WOULD. I TOLD YOU IT'S A PIECE OF CAKE

TIME WE GOT COOKING OURSELVES PLOD' HERE — GRAB OF THESE'

A BOWLING BALL? WE HAVEN'T GOT TIME FOR A GAME WISE'

AN APPROACHING OBJECT DETECTED. RANGE 100 METRES

INTRUDER ON V SUAL SCAN X-RAY AND INFRA-RED INDICATE NON-HUMAN CONCLUSION INTRUDER IS A ROBOT

ROBOT ATTACKER NOT INCLUDED IN MY DATA BANKS INTERPRETATION A TEST OF MY AB LITY TO HANDLE UNEXPECTED SITUATION

USE MAXIMUM FORCE.

I MUST OVERCOME HIM QUICKLY THERE IS MUCH TO BE DONE

THE HEAVY CHAIN WHIPPED ARDUND WALDO

NEED ONLY INCAPAC TATE HIM LONG ENOUGH TO CUT OFF H S POWER SUPPLY'

BUT

SNAP!

UNDERESTIMAT ON HE IS STRONGER THAN EXPECTED

TRUST

Imagine if you can a huge pantheon of comic book characters. Among their number is one with arachnid-like powers and another who is a flying Viking. There is also a wily magician and a metal man of action.
***Steve Laming** takes us back to the heady days of...*

LION

THE KING OF STORY PAPERS, 23 FEBRUARY 1952-18 MAY 1974

Zip's Unusual Task—T
SPOT THE CLUE WITH ZIP NOLAN
AND THE BEST OF LUCK TO EM
HOLD IT, YOU FELLERS! YOU ARE ALL UNDER ARREST!
ZIP'S BOSS, CAPTAIN BRINK WORRIED...
THESE INDIANS DON'T KNOW THE VALUE OF MONEY, NOLAN I WANT YOU TO SEE THAT NO CROOK TR
TO ROB THEM WH
THEY'RE IN PENSBURGH
ZIP TRIED TO KEE SO MUCH TO AM
DO NOT TOUCH
OFFICER! THE STORE IS BEING ATTACKED BY WILD INDIANS THEY'RE CHASING THE CUSTOMERS AWAY!
THEY'RE NOT MY INDIANS. I'M HERE TO PROTECT THEM FROM CROOKS THAT GUY OVER THERE LOOKS SUSPICIOUS I'D BETTER KEEP AN EYE ON HIM!
THE CLUE?
EJECTOR SEAT!
U READ?
NO MISTER WE WERE TOO POOR TO GO TO SCHOOL BUT WE'RE RICH NOW WE'LL BUY YOU ANOTHER FIRE SEAT
DO NOT TOUCH

I am not describing the heroes of the American Marvel universe, *Spider-man*, *The Mighty Thor*, *Dr. Strange* and *Iron Man*.

These characters are just a few of the many that populated the British *Lion* comic in its 22 years of life. Their names? *The Spider*, *Phantom Viking*, the *Spellbinder* and *Robot Archie*. The adventures of these classic characters sent excited children racing to their local newsagent every week.

Lion was originally conceived to be a rival for Hulton's massive success, the *Eagle*. It even featured on its front cover, Captain Condor, whose space adventures were obviously meant to mimic those of *Eagle*'s hugely popular Dan Dare. I do not want to underestimate the popularity of *Eagle* comic at that time. At the height of it's popularity it sold 750,000 copies a week. An American title at that time would be lucky to sell that amount in a month.

Eagle was a polished, beautifully drawn, photogravure publication. The Amalgamated Press *Lion* was printed on very poor quality paper and contained no interior colour. The *Eagle*, perhaps, suffered from being just too good. It had no where to go but down. After many years of sustained high production values, its quality did fall as did its sales. *Lion*, on the other hand, improved over the years, especially the 1960's. It never reached the heights of *Eagle*, but somehow managed

to keep a healthy regular readership for some years longer. *The Lion*, cover-dated 3 May 1969, absorbed the *Eagle*, a comic it was merely meant to imitate.

The *Eagle* comic was not *Lion*'s first victim, however. Ten years before Amalgamated Press Group had decided, after a printer's strike, that some of its comic publications could no longer survive. Their name, too, was changed to Fleetway Publications. The effect on *Lion* was that it became incorporated with *Sun* (which was a comic and not that well known daily) with the issue dated 24th October 1959. Thanks in part to a bunch of new artists that hopped aboard *Lion*'s pages, it was ready to embrace the most exciting period of its life, the sixties.

The new artists on *Lion* began reinvigorating old characters such as Captain Condor, Sandy Dean (adventures of a schoolboy at Tollgate School), Robot Archie (who began in the first issue in a strip called Jungle Robot), Billy the Kid and many others. New characters were constantly appearing such as Rory Macduff. One of Rory's adventures involved 'The ghost of Jason Rollo'. I discovered this story in the early seventies, in 1968 copies of *Lion* which I found in a comic box we had in class at school (I now realise that this was actually a reprint and the story first appeared in *Lion* in 1963).

I was absolutely captivated by this yarn and stories of this quality are why I still read comics. To this day I have still not read that story to its conclusion. I hope to at some point and no longer care if its a reprint or not.

I began by comparing *Lion* with Marvel comics. This is because of the type of characters which populate both universes. *Lion* even had a barbarian character in 'Karl the Viking' (drawn mainly by the superb Don Lawrence) long before Marvel adopted Conan. I was never a fan of sports related stories and Marvel and *Lion* rarely featured them. One exception, however, was *Lion*'s 'Carson's Cubs', which I loved. I think now that the main reason for my 1972 defection to Marvel comics was due to their interactive universe. Each character in British comics appeared to live in his own world, which was unrelated to that of the other characters in the same comic. *Lion*, however, bucked the trend in a small way.

The White Man Who Became Chief Of An Indian Tribe!
TEXAS JACK-INDIAN CHIEF
NINE YEARS BACK PAY—FOR BEING IN THE DEEP-FREEZE!
DAN DARE

Some of the characters did feature in the other's strips. Robot Archie met the Sludge, a monster which had starred in its own story. Carson's Cubs played against and with Eagle's 'Circus Wanderers'. Doktor ratz, a character from 'The Black Max' strip went on to become a star himself in 'Secrets of the Demon Dwarf'. The stories 'The White Eyes' and 'Shadow of the Snake' were continued as 'Masters of Menace', when these villains united. So *Lion* did, at least to a limited extent, have a universe where its characters shared their adventures.

Something else I've noticed while writing this is the amount of villainous characters *Lion* featured.

The Black Max, The Spider, The Sludge, The Snake and The White Eyes were all characters of a dubious nature. Makes you wonder just what those writers for *Lion* were thinking about way back when.

Lion's next victim was *Champion*.

This was the revived version of the *Champion* comic which had had a very respectable run of 1729 issues, between 1922 and 1955. This version (subtitled 'the companion paper to Valiant' (another successful Fleetway comic for those who don't know)), however, only lasted 15 issues before it became incorporated with *Lion*, 11 June 1966. Jet Jordan (a reprint from a Belgian comic) came with the merger. Jet was the son of an inventor of (you guessed it) jets. Jet's aerobatic team (in the British version) were known as 'The Red Bisons'. The already mentioned 'Phantom Viking' otherwise known as the meek Olaf Larson (Don Blake, anyone?) who changed to the flying norseman after putting on his Viking helmet. He was the longest lasting survivor of this merger.

TV's *Danger Man*, drawn by Jesus Blasco (who drew the excellent 'Steel Claw' in *Valiant*), also featured in the newly combined *Lion* and Champion.

This was an unusual move for Fleetway as they did not often feature TV related characters. This task was usually left to comic publications such as *TV Century 21* and *TV Comic*. The main reason for this is that it was far cheaper to create a similar character than to pay for the right to feature TV characters. After a thirteen week run, that is exactly what they did. Danger Man was replaced by *Lion*'s very own 'Code Name- Barracuda'.

In 1966 *Lion* introduced the football strip 'Carson's Cubs'. This story ran for seven years and was popular with readers. Despite it being a football related, there was always a background story that involved Joe Carson and the kids, giving an added interest to those not really fond of the beautiful game.

May 1969 saw *Lion* make its biggest kill. *Lion* became merged with *Eagle*.

Four *Eagle* strips survived the

merger. The were 'Dan Dare', 'The Gladiators' (fighters from ancient Rome's coliseum who had been transported through time to WWII), 'The Waxer' (who was yet another Fleetway criminal starring in his own strip) and 'Lightning Stormm' (a disabled, crime busting ex-racing driver). For me, however, the best strip to grace this first merged issue was 'Turville's Touchstone', a strip that would later be renamed 'The Spellbinder'. This was to be an enduring and consistently popular story. It was drawn by Geoff Campion and sometimes Reg Bunn. I loved this story. I remember tracking down a copy of the first *Lion* and Eagle in a second hand shop while on holiday on the Isle of Wight in 1971. I remember reading as Tom Turville, an orphan, inherited sprawling Turville Hall. The artwork was so good I could actually feel cobwebs on my face as Tom took a torch lit tour round the old mansion. He found his ancestor, Sylvester, who had been sleeping for centuries and whose life was extended thanks to his wondrous jewel, the philosopher's stone or touchstone. This yarn captured my young imagination like none before. I kept wondering just what it would be like to own my own touchstone. I probably would have wished for all the *Lions* I was missing in my collection for starters.I found many of the early *Lions* in second hand book shops, where I confess I spent much of my time.

...SCREAM, PROBABLY!

The first new issue of *Lion* I bought was a relaunch issue dated 7 February 1970. Please forgive me if I become a little more passionate about this particular comic. It really was something of an event for me at the time. George Best featured on the cover in a Manchester United strip. Fleetway comics (*Valiant*, *Smash*, *Tiger*, etc.) were doing a football album and cards promotion at the time which is probably what encouraged me to buy *Lion* (and the other titles). The comic contained a bunch of new stories. Each one was numbered. For example 'New story No.2- England invaded by brutal Norman knights' was the banner for the first episode of the beautifully drawn 'Flame o' the Forest'. This story featured a medieval masked character who fought against the conquerors. 'The Fugitive from Planet Scror' was another new story. This tale saw Karg, a Scrorian who was less than happy with his people's plan to destroy the Earth. He fled his ship with a key which was vital to operate the bomb ship. Most of this story involved the pursuit of Karg by his erstwhile shipmates. Another new story was 'General Johnny', a kid who had somehow developed incredible

ADAM ETERND
600
THROUGH THE DARKNESS OF TIME AND SPACE WHIRLED THE STRANGE FIGURE OF ADAM ETERND... DOOMED TO LIVE FOR EVER UNLESS STRUCK A FATAL BLOW BY A WEAPON OF SOLID GOLD!
BY MITRA! ONCE MORE THE WINDS OF FATE CARRY ME BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING! WHAT INJUSTICE OR EVIL WILL I BE CALLED ON TO FIGHT THIS TIME?
THE DARK AGES OF SEVENTH CENTURY BRITAIN! THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR! BUT THESE ARE NO COURTLY KNIGHTS, WHO WOULD PERSECUTE HELPLESS VILLAGERS!
HELP ME, GOOD SIR! I FEAR SLAVERY IN THE GOLD MINES OF ENDLESS TOIL!
GOLD MINES! CROM, THE VERY NAME OF THAT ACCURSED METAL BRINGS TERROR TO MY MIND!
GUHHH..?
BUT ADAM COULD NOT STAND BY AND SEE THE BOY STRUCK HELPLESS DOWN!
BACK, BLACKGUARD! MERE STEEL HOLDS NO

military acumen and became adopted by the war office. Finally, 'Stringbean and Hambone'. These inept tag-team wrestlers suddenly became successful after unknowingly procuring a magic eye. It was hidden in a lamp aboard a Chinese junk ship they possessed.

After reading this comic I decided *Lion* was the comic for me and I gave up *TV21*. In retrospect I realise just how impressed with *Lion* I must have been. *TV21* was still lavish, colourful and graced with excellent artwork. It also featured, in the main, well-known and popular TV characters. Despite this, I had been won over by the much poorer quality, letterpress *Lion*. I would stay with the title for another two years and as many back issues as I could find.

A few months later *Lion* was given another revamp issue. The issue cover dated 25 July 1970 again featured numbered new stories. For me the best of these was (because I love science fiction, remember vintage *Star Trek* was a new programme back then) 'Britain A.D. 2170'. This story, like 'Fugitive from Planet Scror', was drawn by the Lopez Studio. It featured the return to Earth (after a five year mission, honest) of the probe-ship *Explorer*. The trouble was there had been some mighty big changes on the mother planet in that last half decade. I will mention the impressive cover of this particular issue as it featured the 'Britain...' story and showed London's Trafalgar Square in overgrown ruins. I was a nine year old filled with excited anticipation of the latest *Lion*'s contents after receiving this comic through the letterbox one Saturday morning back in 1970.

Lion's last merger before being consumed itself was with the relatively new comic, 'Thunder', 20 March 1971. *Thunder* had only enjoyed a short run of 22 issues between October 1970 and March 1971. It was apparently created with a merger in mind. Unlike the previous mergers, *Thunder*'s strips dominated the new *Lion* and *Thunder*. Seven strips transferred into the new weekly.

'The Black Max', featured German air ace Von Klorr, who used his flying skills and giant bats to fight the allies in WWI. 'Fury's Family', saw the eponymous Fury and his

family (ex-circus animals) travelling through Africa.

'Phil the Fluter', featured Phil who was able to freeze people in their tracks by blowing his flute. This came in handy if he wanted to gain revenge on people who had slighted him or stop criminals or accidents, etc. 'The Jet Skaters' were a bunch of kids who had been sent some powered skating boots by their film-producing uncle (they had been props from a movie that actually worked, despite no apparent power source). I remember a boy of more than dubious credibility, telling me at school how his uncle who worked on Star Trek would soon be sending us some phaser pistols. I am still waiting. 'The Steel Commando', was a British automaton weapon. This was a more steeped in humour than Archie, the paper's other robot story. 'The Jigsaw Journey', was a quest type story in the mould of 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'. The most important and longest lasting survivor of the merger was 'Adam Eterno'. Adam had drank the elixer of life and could only be killed by a weapon of gold. After receiving a bash on the head by a golden weapon he found himself to be a nomad in time, jumping from adventure to adventure.

Conveniently he would only disappear into space and time at the conclusion of each story.

I continued reading *Lion* and *Thunder* for some months after this point in its history. I enjoyed 'Carson's Cubs', 'The Spellbinder', 'Adam Eterno', The Black Max' and its sequel 'Secrets of the Demon Dwarf'. Something was missing, however. I was no longer getting the same buzz that my first copy of *Lion* had given me or the back-issues I had managed to find. It was not because I was getting older either. I had started to pick up American comics.

DC comics, to be honest (apart from the Jack Kirkby stuff) did very little for me, but I had become captivated by Marvel comics and Spider-man in particular. For a reader of comics at this time there was a massive amount of choice available. British comics covered everything from war to humour, science fiction to football. Adventure and knowledge publications for young people littered the newsagents every week. The American wave was coming, however. It would play a big part in sounding the death knell of the widely available British comic. I do feel a little guilty for being seduced by its call.

Lion continued after its amalgamation with *Thunder*. It retained that title until 18 May 1974. This meant that it had kept the 'Thunder' subtitle for over three years. No previous merger had been recognised for so long. On the 25 May 1974, *Lion* itself was consumed by its stable rival 'Valiant'. The only *Lion* strips which went into the newly merged title were 'Mowser', a humour strip, 'Zip Nolan', who asked you to spot the clue each week and 'Adam Eterno', the last survivor of *Thunder* comic. *Valiant* retained the *Lion* banner until 22 March 1975. There was some controversy about which comic, *Lion* or *Valiant*, had enjoyed the higher sales. The respective editorial teams disputed sales figures. Some believed *Lion* should have taken over *Valiant*. It really did not matter in the longer term as *Valiant* itself, was absorbed by 'Battle Picture Weekly' in 1976.

I felt saddened by *Lion*'s demise, even though I was no longer a reader. Looking back at its content it seems very innocent and crude. Without doubt though it had a charm which will probably never be seen again. Was this then, the end of *Lion* and its pantheon of characters? Not entirely. This being just a brief overview I have not mentioned the Summer Specials which continued until 1980 or the Annuals which went on until 1983. Certain characters have appeared in *2000AD* and its spin-off specials. You never quite know when a nostalgic writer might give Robot Archie or Sylvester Turville a much-welcomed appearance, by this fan at least.

I have drawn quite heavily from The *Lion* Index, by Steve Holland and Gary Armitage, while putting this article together. It is highly recommended and is available from A&B Whitworth. It is a wonderful production for those interested in that late, great British weekly, *Lion*, King of Picture Story Papers. ●